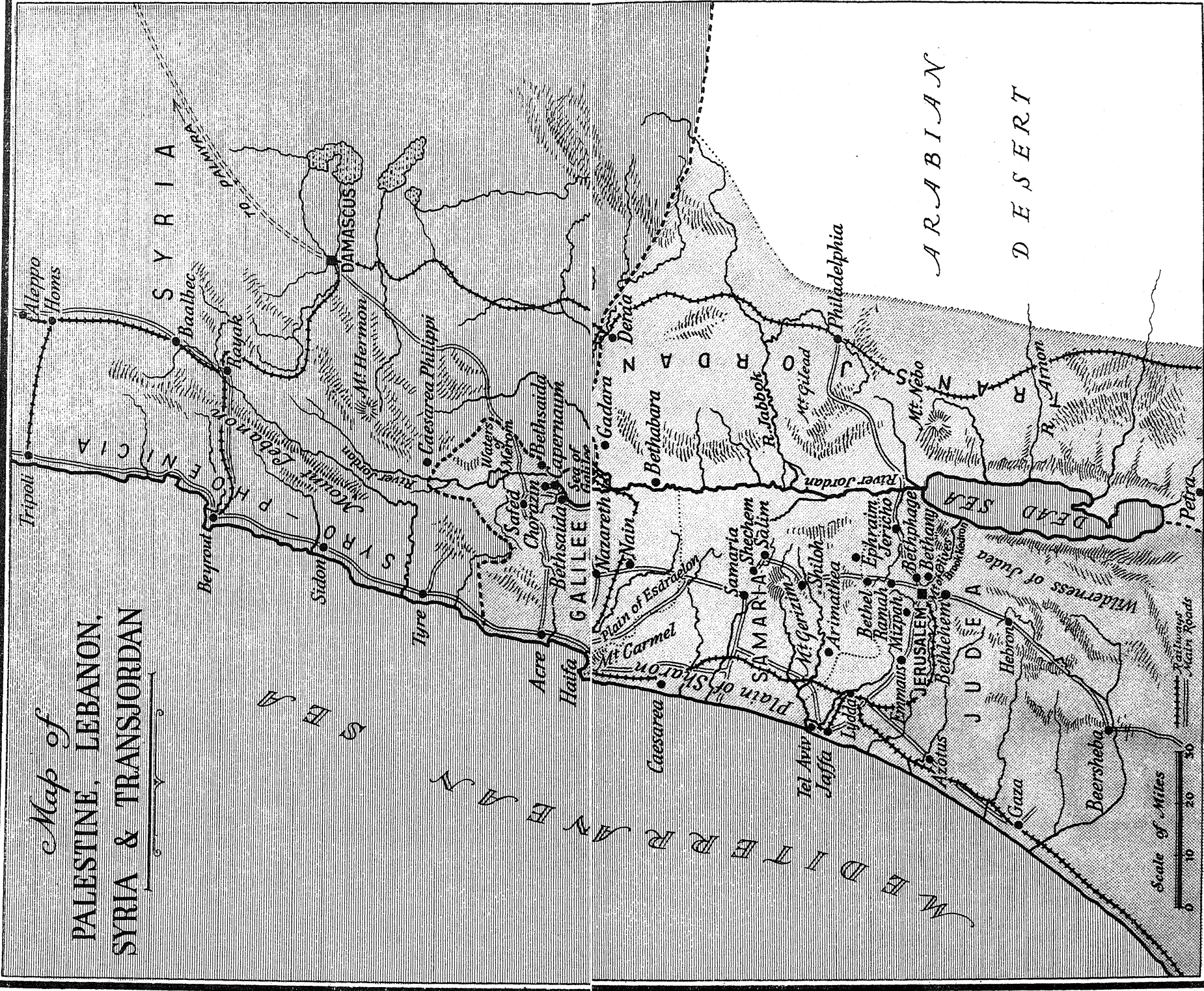


Map of PALESTINE, LEBANON, SYRIA & TRANSJORDAN



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PALESTINE



A READER IN THE SYNAGOGUE

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Frontispice



PALESTINE

The Land of My Adoption

J. W. CLAPHAM

JERUSALEM

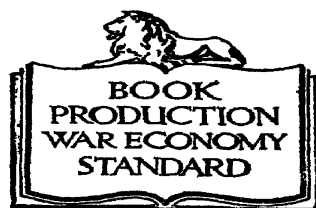
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Made and Printed in Great Britain

Preface

OF the making of books on Palestine there is no end, for the public invariably looks for more.

Taken as a mere geographical area, Palestine could claim but a modest share of interest in world affairs; looked at in its true setting, in conjunction with Christ and the Scriptures, it holds a place unique and incomparable amongst the countries of the world.

Daily, through the medium of hundreds of spoken languages, the geography of this small land is brought before the notice of the world; and the names of Abraham, Jacob, David, and the Apostles are incessantly upon the lips of men and women.

Each day, too, there are those who, desiring to satisfy the soul's deepest need, long to company with, and worship, and hang upon the words of the Redeemer as He moves to and fro in the Holy Land; while millions, in loving sympathy, continue to tarry by the middle Cross at Calvary, or visit the empty tomb with Mary, or watch Christ ascending heavenwards from Olivet, hoping for His return.

Geographically and strategically, Palestine is of great importance. It forms the natural bridge between Europe and Asia in the north, and Africa in the south; being also the common cross-road between East and West. Great in its past, Palestine confidently awaits a still greater future. It occupies the key position in the master plan of all the ages.

A king upon his throne invariably chooses a queen bride to adorn his household, as well as an executive to attend to his affairs of state.

The King of kings is at present taking out from this world a Bride, the Church, to whom He once said, "I go to prepare a place for you."

In addition to this, He, Whose right it is to reign on earth, as well as in heaven, has also in view an earthly kingdom, wherein "the lion shall lie down with the lamb"; and Israel, restored to the

Land of Promise, after the unparalleled time of "Jacob's trouble," will be the earthly executive during His Millennial reign.

For the author, Palestine has an additional significance. As the land of his adoption, it and the countries around have been for years past the scene of his labours and the spiritual battleground of his defeats and victories.

Of our esteemed friends and fellow-workers in the land, we could write much; but this, as well as any reference to our own labours, is quite outside the scope of this volume. Our theme is Palestine and the Scriptures; and the theme of all Scripture is Christ.

The author would, however, use this opportunity to express his sincere thanks and gratitude to those colleagues who have shared with him the heat and burden of the day, and also for those friends and relatives who, from lands far and near, have upheld both them and him, in practical love and fellowship.

He is grateful, too, for the loyal companionship of a faithful helpmeet, who, sometimes alone, or with her little daughter, has had to face, with Christian fortitude, trials and even dangers.

During the regrettable Arabic-Jewish troubles, all have experienced their anxious moments. How often, when the midnight air has suddenly echoed to the crack of rifle fire, or the rumble of armoured cars, we have committed our respective families to the care of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to prove His present faithfulness in the land.

J. W. CLAPHAM

JERUSALEM

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The Publishers desire to express their indebtedness to Dr. R. J. SMITHSON for valued help in preparing this book for publication.

CHAPTER I

Old Jerusalem

I

THE time is 9.30 a.m. It is just five hours since, rubbing from my eyes the dust of the Sinai desert, I had gazed from the carriage window into the grey light of dawn to see, for the first time, strings of camels, fat-tailed sheep, and squatting patriarchal figures at Ashdod, Gaza, and other places along the great rolling plains of Beersheba.

From the junction at Ludd (ancient Lydda), we have crept painfully up the rocky valley of the Sorek till our train now comes to rest; and on the station I read, with some emotion, the significant name, Jerusalem!

From a bunch of vociferous garrymen clamouring eagerly outside the station gates, I select the one who shouts a little louder than the rest. He seizes my luggage as if in a state of frenzy; then, rising in his seat, he flogs his bony-looking horse into a gallop, till it seems as though the wheels of his antiquated vehicle will collapse in disaster.

Protests are all in vain, seeing that a number of other garrymen have by now joined in the race from the station to the city; but my man proudly holds his lead.

Come what may, one is fully resolved not to allow one's mind to be distracted from this long-anticipated thrill of entering, for the first time, this by far the most unique and historic city in the world.

Even at this moment, the grey walls of Old Jerusalem are distinctly silhouetted against an expanse of spotless blue. Bathed in the rich Palestine sunshine of this lovely spring morning, they appear neither gloomy nor forbidding, but almost genial to the eye.

As the chariot race slackens, one's pulse suddenly quickens.

Only a few moments more, and . . .

But, alas! the unexpected happens. The exquisite privilege of entering that massive gateway in reverent contemplation is for ever shattered; like a bolt from the blue, one finds oneself the cynosure of the public gaze, as being the unwilling principal in one of those familiar, but none the less ludicrous street arguments,

in which neither right, reason, nor dignity has a leg to stand on.

The garryman is badly in need of money. He has won the race for his British client; so, in place of logic, he attempts to shout me into paying an excessive fee, plus a little extra for the stakes of victory.

Seeing my dilemma, an Arabic policeman seems delighted to intervene on my behalf. By alternating threats and coaxings, he succeeds in toning down this premeditated swindle. The shouting of the garryman quickly subsides into a grin as he pockets his still exorbitant charge, and drives off, bidding us the usual "Ma'-es-Salameh."

What delightful irony! This peace disturber actually bidding us "go in peace."*

Pulling myself together, I thank the policeman, and join the crowd of pedestrians surging in the direction of the Jaffa Gate.

There is no mistaking the contour of this well-known pile of masonry. Above the venerable archway, green bunches of hyssop, rooted securely between the joints in the wall, look down with benign indifference upon a never-ending stream of human ants, passing and repassing through the right-angled entrance of the gateway.

Rising above the clatter of feet and the crying of street vendors, one sound seems to obtrude itself in a special way upon the ear. It is a noise common to all the cities of the Middle East; being, in fact, an integral part of the Middle East. It is produced by that ubiquitous soft-drink seller of sherbet, beating out his continuous and rhythmic rat-tat-too. This he does by the skilful manipulation of two brass, saucer-like cups held between the fingers of the left hand, as he stalks boldly through the crowd.

Immediately upon our right, as we enter the city, we are overshadowed by the massive Citadel of David. One of the towers, known in Roman times as Phasaël, is said to be amongst the few landmarks spared by the victorious Titus after his capture of the city in A.D. 70.

Our eye next alights upon the crowd; for most probably never before have we looked upon such a medley of nationalities; inwardly we think of the strange magnetic power of this isolated and non-commercial city, which is still able to draw within its walls such an amazing contrast of humanity.

An Arab porter, dressed in sacking, passes us with straddling

* Owing to the advent of the automobile into Palestine, these garry episodes are now practically a thing of the past.

gait. His thin legs seem as if they might snap beneath his enormous load. With head and shoulders bent low, he cannot see in advance, so cries, mechanically, "Oo-aare," to clear the way. If his load be too burdensome, his small assistant will walk beside him cursing the client who has cruelly allotted him such a burden.

Here is a party of Orthodox Jews returning from the Wailing Wall. Despite the excessive heat, each is dressed in black, and wears one of those wide furry hats from under which hang the distinguishing side curls, as an indication that they have not marred the "corner of their beards." Dignified and sallow of countenance, we read in their dark eyes hidden fires and thoughts of another world and age than ours.

Passing on our right is a group of stately Bedouin fresh from the desert of Transjordan. They are of the better class. The picturesque headdress, the flowing robes, the general poise and aquiline features all seem to remind us of the patriarchs. One of the party is outstanding. Evidently a person of rank, he carries a sword in his girdle instead of the usual concealed dagger. He is every inch a man, and knows it. He belongs to a race that has never once, in all its history, bowed before a conqueror.

The farmers on our left are from Bethlehem or the surrounding villages. They are early birds, these fellaheen, and crowd into the city before most people are awake. Their women, conspicuous by their special headdress, are heavily laden with farm produce, while their menfolk drive before them small nimble donkeys, which they direct to the right or left by smart raps on the neck with a stick. Poor little slim-legged, patient animals! They live out their existence merely for the use, or alas, the misuse, of their thoughtless owners.

We enter the narrow stepped Street of David, leading downward from the Citadel area to the Tyropean Valley and heart of the old city. The congestion of pedestrian traffic here is indescribable. A party of docile tourists, led by a voluble guide, partially blocks the stream of traffic. Here come smiling Abyssinians with their frizzy hair and snow-white teeth, their tall spare figures draped in robes of black. To complete the medley, we pass Greek, Latin, and Armenian priests or monks, dressed in white, brown, or black, according to their respective orders; sisters from the convents, Russian pilgrims (women stranded in Jerusalem since the first World War, and living on a mere pittance from the Church), Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks, Germans, French, Italians, sleek Arab effendis with their bright red tarbooshes; beggars, mystics,

fanatics, veiled Moslem women, hawkers with sweetmeats upon their heads, and yelling at the top of their voices; all these and others unnamed rubbing shoulders together as they jostle in this narrow street. If you stop for a moment to look at some object of interest, you are butted in the ribs by a sack of meal borne by a donkey; and the owner, thinking only of his right of way, cries mechanically, "Oo-are!"

The small shops of the merchants remind you of the stories of wonderland. Entirely open to the street they display an amount of merchandise that is truly amazing, considering the floor space available. They are marvels of compactness and arrangement, their owners sitting or standing amidst the wares, often alone, dealing out produce or handling haggling customers with a calmness born of experience.

Here is a grain shop. We try to escape for a moment from the surging mass of humanity by pressing hard against the shop front. Look at those neat pyramids of peas, beans, vetches, barley, sesame, peanuts, carob-beans, wheat, and what-not. It is really astonishing how so many distinct piles of grain can be arranged in so orderly a manner in such a few square yards. Should you care to buy, you will if the merchant be but ordinarily honest, receive "good measure, pressed down, and running over." A privileged cat sleeps on a bag of seeds, unperturbed by the noise and din. The merchant himself, fat and with flowing tussore robes, dominates the scene. His shop may be small, but, as he sips with relish his strong cup of Turkish coffee between his acts of salesmanship, it is not unlikely he will be thinking of his two sons studying medicine at the Beyrout University. The banking account of some of these merchants, working single-handed, might prove to be surprising.

Reaching the bottom of David Street, we turn sharply to the left, and find ourselves in the suks or markets of the old city. They are narrow and completely arched over, with here and there an aperture admitting shafts of light. The idea, one supposes, in constructing them thus is to ensure shade and coolness in summer, and protection from rain in winter. These human warrens are a never-ending source of interest to the stranger. There is the meat suk (pronounced "sook"), the vegetable suk, the saddlers' suk, the gold suk, the copper suk, and so on. Instead of appearing to avoid each other's competition, those of like occupation seem to club together. Apparently there are no trade secrets. For instance, the most delicate jewellery is made before the eyes

of the passers-by. The deafening din of hammers indicates where the copper-smiths are at work. The shops are all small, single-roomed, open to the street, and barred and shuttered at night.

We come upon two men making primitive wooden ploughs, in all probability similar to those used in the days of Elisha. We shudder as they bring down their adzes to within a fraction of an inch from their bare toes which hold the wood in position. One man is wearing a special headdress indicating his direct descent from the Prophet Mohamet.

Here are the butchers' shops. Carcases of lamb and mutton are adorned with pink roses and jasmine, stuck here and there, to catch the eye of the customer. The meat is wholesome, but the older sheep have been too athletic to make good eating. A number of cats crouch a few inches below the meat, waiting patiently for stray fragments to be thrown to them. No one seems to ill treat this favoured house pet known as "Bissy," except that small kittens not wanted are turned adrift on the streets to be picked up or die of starvation. The dog finds no favour as a pet either with Jew or Gentile.

We are now approaching the north wall of the city, and soon find ourselves at the famous Damascus Gate, second in importance only to the Jaffa Gate. From this focal point, a road runs due north to Galilee and Damascus. Just outside the city wall, and to the right of the gate is the little mound known as Gordon's Calvary, believed by many to be the place where the Lord suffered death for the sins of the world. But we will now turn back and traverse the city by another route not so congested as the one through which we have just passed.

Here are some tourists, examining an inscription set into the masonry of a house which stands upon the street, and reading as follows: "Third Station of the Cross." It is an indication that we have arrived at the renowned Via Dolorosa, or Road of Sorrow, along which our Lord is supposed to have passed on His way to the Cross. There are thirteen of these so-called stations along this road, each supposed to mark some incident that took place during the sad procession. As we pause before these various stations, inwardly we find ourselves asking: "Is this really the road traversed by the Lord on that fateful day in the world's history, when He passed from the Roman quarter to the place of crucifixion?"

Of one thing we are sure. The original road leading from the stronghold of Antonia must be far below the present level of the

city; and we cannot help feeling that these thirteen stations of the Cross are but figments of the imagination.

At one of these stations in the Via Dolorosa we read that Veronica wiped the face of the Lord when He fell down beneath the weight of the cross, and received, in return, a miraculous impression of the Lord's face upon the linen cloth.

If we enter the little souvenir-shop marking this station, we may see, in a dimly-lighted cell, a life-size tableau of this supposed incident. Passing down a number of steps we may see a genuine relic which many tourists miss—a portion of the ancient street far below the present level of the city. Three arches span the old Roman highway, a large central arch, with two smaller ones on either side for pedestrian traffic. These old Romans were sticklers for law and order, and always seemed to work on this three-track system for their public thoroughfares.

II

The old city of Jerusalem is extraordinarily compact. In days when it was not safe to live outside the walls, every foot of space within the city was valuable. In consequence the streets are narrow and the courtyards of the average house are cramped. Many of the streets are partly built over. Everything is of stone. The houses have small, barred windows, narrow stairways and heavy arched doors often thickly studded with iron bolts.

Originally the city was divided into four distinct quarters by the Tyropean Valley and another smaller depression. But the rubbish of ages has greatly reduced the depth of the Tyropean Valley, though it is interesting to learn that the ancient sewerage and water systems of the Jews are still preserved more or less intact below this superimposed debris.

Parts of the old city of Jerusalem form a literal labyrinth of stone, and one wonders how people could ever find their way about. Some of the narrow alleys seem thinly populated, while others teem with life.

In one of these narrow roadways we come upon an isolated restaurant in which a group of men are arguing furiously. The nervous energy being expended over what may be nothing more than a half a farthing is terrific. It seems as though the dispute will end in bloodshed till a native policeman, approaching the group, singles out the most likely-looking offender, and deals him one or two sickening punches on the neck, bidding him "Imshi," or begone! A few brass buttons and a brass number plate render the person of

the policeman more or less immune from retaliation, and the fires of hatred which burned so furiously a few moments before seem magically quelled. Left to themselves, there is no knowing where such a trifling incident might end. A British police gendarme in such circumstances usually does, by a few quiet words, what the native guardian of the law might do by blows.

Wearied in body, but by no means bored in spirit, we retrace our steps along David Street to our hotel near the Citadel. I fling myself upon a divan, and begin to meditate upon the kaleidoscopic events of the day. We have been permitted to see with our own eyes Jerusalem, the so-called Holy City—this city of mixed religious systems, of unreasoning fanaticism and fictitious sites; a city where deceit, trickery, and casual indifference, politeness, hospitality and friendly helpfulness exist side by side; where autocracy, democracy, and priestcraft, seem equally to prosper. We have had a peep at its narrow streets and its restless throng of humanity, a mere glance at the great exterior; the best and the worst we have not yet seen, and, whatever our impressions may have been, we certainly cannot say we have found this either dull or uninteresting, but the very reverse.

III

The time is now 9.30 p.m., just twelve hours since we arrived at the railway station outside Jerusalem. Though the day has been strenuous and exciting, one feels, after rest and refreshment, a strong urge to venture from the hotel alone, to view the city from a new perspective, and under cover of darkness. But before doing so we climb, by a narrow flight of stone steps, to a point of vantage on the flat roof-top of the hotel, whence we are enabled to look right down upon the upper and lower quarters of the city. The sun has long since departed amidst a blaze of glory behind the mountains of Judea, and in its place a full moon has climbed from the tops of the Hills of Moab some distance in the eastern sky, flooding the thousand and one flat or domed roof-tops, towers and minarets with that weird light which turns the harshness and glare of day into soft beauty, and divides each object into ghostly paleness or mysterious gloom. Here at last is Jerusalem, the real Jerusalem of our dreams and ideals. What we have seen hitherto was but a turbulent stream of human restlessness. Now we have made contact, as it were, with the very soul of this ancient city. We gaze in awed silence on the scene around. These domes, these walls, these eternal landmarks—what an immense, im-

measurable part they have played in the destinies of men, of armies, and of nations!

Three outstanding objects seem to dominate the scene, the Mount of Olives, the Temple Area, with its inimitable Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

But where are the crowds in David Street below? They seem now to have completely vanished. A death-like stillness has descended where before all was noise and confusion. The shops and suks are bolted and barred. The fat merchant in the tussore robes will long since be ensconced at home with his family, behind barred windows, counting out the profits of the day. The city seems to be given over to a few police or watchmen, while an occasional pedestrian, hurrying from a neighbouring cafe, turns down a cobbled side street and disappears from view.

I V

Before retiring for the night in hope of a well-earned sleep, there remains one longing desire yet to be fulfilled, to walk all alone in these silent streets and to view the Citadel of David by moonlight. Turning to descend from the roof-top, one is surprised and almost startled to see the reflection of moonbeams from a large rectangular pool of water almost at one's feet. It is the reservoir of Hezekiah, walled in by surrounding buildings, of which our hotel is one. The sight of this historic pool thrills one to the heart, as being a genuine relic, linking us with the past.

I descend from the roof-top and venture into the street alone. As I stroll in silence and solitude, now in deepening shadow, now in an expanse of broad moonlight, narratives from Bible history crowd quickly to the mind. An ancient dry moat separates the street from the grim old citadel, over which passes a draw-bridge, guarded by a stone tower and gateway.

Attracted by the murmur of voices within, I feel strongly tempted to venture a peep through a chink in the ponderous arched door standing slightly ajar. Two watchmen squat in the gateway. It is chilly, so they warm their hands over a brazier of glowing coals.

Imagination takes flight, and the scene through the chink in the door grips and fascinates the mind. Two unwitting actors, oblivious, in all probability, to the priceless setting which surrounds them, and of the presence of the spell-bound, one-man audience at the peep-hole, have succeeded in doing what the greatest actor longs to do, to enchant and chain the imagination of his audience.

Instantly one's thoughts leap backward across two millenniums of time to another scene in old Jerusalem, a band of Jewish watchmen keeping guard around a fire of coals, before the door of a High Priest's palace. Behind that door, a company of proud and ruthless fanatics, under the guise of religion, are baiting an innocent and unresisting Victim; while the city outside is perturbed and wondering.

Could it be possible that these huge blocks of bevelled masonry, looking down even now from the heights of David's Tower had been on guard on that night of nights in the world's history, when the same full moon flooded with its rays these self-same landmarks, and the sacred hollow of Gethsemane at the foot of Olivet, still wet with tears; that night of nights, too, when the little skull-like knoll outside the north wall was awaiting its wondrous morrow, and the bloodstains from the middle cross—"precious blood," which alone could cancel man's guilt, and free him from the penalty of sin?

v

Unwilling to risk a peremptory challenge by remaining over-long beside the chink in the door, I steal reluctantly from the shadow of the Citadel, and, slipping silently through the streets to my lodgings, fall asleep, thinking of the Apostle Peter, who listened, sick at heart, to the crowing of the cock, as he denied His Lord in the presence of the guards warming themselves over a fire of coals in a gateway of Old Jerusalem.

●

CHAPTER II

Reverie on Carmel

I

THE water lay, blue and tranquil, in the Bay of Haifa, one cloudless Sunday morning in the month of July. The yellow fringe of coastline swept gracefully and with the symmetry of a gigantic sickle blade from the foot of sleepy Carmel, till it vanished in hazy uncertainty beyond the walled city of Acre, on the other side of the bay.

Winding across the plain that skirts the shore, the ancient River Kishon glittered in the morning sunlight like a ribbon of burnished silver. From the mouth of the river, towards the foot of Carmel, there straggled along the coast a forlorn-looking belt of palm trees, battling grimly for existence against the tide of encroaching civilisation.

It was in this grove, so history has it, that King Richard the Crusader, that lion-hearted leader of the English, once rested for some weeks, whilst recovering from an attack of malaria. Had he but known, as we do now, the origin and nature of this dread malady, he would scarcely have chosen this site for a convalescing camp.

Carmel is not a high mountain, but the side that overlooks the bay is fairly steep to climb. In making the ascent, one encounters rocky ledges, terraced or interspersed with red earth and sparse vegetation. Olives, wild prickly oaks and carob trees grow here and there, and, in the springtime myriads of wild flowers adorn the mountain side.

Occasionally, one comes upon an ancient wine-press, or, it may be, a cistern, cut in the solid rock, and plastered with that peculiar water-tight cement, made from the powder of crushed red pottery. By their sorrowful disuse, these bear silent testimony to that excellence and fertility which was once, and, in some patches, still is, the glory of this mountain promontory.

A brisk climb of half an hour, or less, brings us to the mountain summit, with a view which, for beauty and historic interest, has scarcely a rival in Palestine or any other country. But on this day it is seclusion, not scenery, for which we are in quest.

Almost a stranger in a strange land, with vital questions to be pondered, and decisions to be arrived at, what better place could be found for reverie than on this historic mountain, where Elijah once wrestled with the priests of Baal?

Once upon the summit, we pass, one by one, the Jewish settlements, which, in later years, have begun to spring up towards the Haifa side of the mountain. In Turkish times men could build here almost as they willed, and without let or hindrance; now, the price for good residential sites is becoming almost exorbitant.

Carmel range is about fourteen miles in length. Taking its rise almost from the sea shore, it sweeps inland from west to east, till it terminates in the great plain of Esdraelon. Past the settlements, the scenery becomes wild and uninhabited.

Should there be any who think that custom and tradition die an easy death in these Bible lands, we would point them to that clump of oak trees nestling in a dell to the left of the mountain track. In the centre of the clump is one especially large tree, which might be regarded as the king of the grove. Here is a delightful spot for shade and solitude. But alas for our proposed posse! About to fling oneself down beneath the gnarled old giant, the eye suddenly becomes conscious of little strips of rag, diverse in colours, fluttering from the lower branches. We have come upon a high place or grove, referred to so frequently by writers of the Old Testament.

This grove worship in Israel and the surrounding nations constituted a perpetual challenge to the true worship of Jehovah, being a mixture of pagan superstition and spirit worship. It was in Israel a straw, indicating the direction of the wind, spiritually. Zealous Jewish kings cut down these groves and placed a ban upon worship in the high places; but the least declension in the national zeal for God, was invariably followed by a fresh revival of grove worship. Until this day, women of the land still steal to these high places to pray for the gift of children; and men will turn aside to request the removal of some grave disability. Almost every village in this and surrounding countries has one or more of these weles or mazars, as they are called; and Moslems, Jews, and Christians still have a strong predilection for these high places, of which many are of great antiquity, reaching far back beyond the origin of any of the present-day communities. Hither the mysterious jinns or spirits are supposed to resort; and sometimes the tomb of some great or venerated personage helps to "sanctify" the place. These bits of rag before us are just so many tokens of vows solemnly

pledged, and meant to be carried out when the requests have been duly answered. One of the commonest vows is that made by women concerning their unborn children.

Is it to be wondered at that those who lack a knowledge of God should be allured by these mysterious glades, shut away as they are from the noise and clamour of life, where men can at least be alone with nature and listen to the music of the wind playing through the leafy branches overhead. Such places naturally lend themselves to calmness of mind and quiet introspection, apart from any help which the jinns may render. For us, however, this Grove of the Forty Oaks, as it is locally called, seems a contaminated place, so we pass on.

The scenery now becomes wilder and more primitive. Though leopards are believed to be extinct in Carmel, one feels it would hardly be a surprise to see a lithe form gliding from behind a rock or thicket. Sure enough, there goes a jackal. Disturbed in his lonely ravine, he scurries off along a rocky ledge. Pausing for a moment at a safe distance, he eyes us warily, then trots away and disappears, leaving us all alone to the weird and intermittent sighing of the wind through the oaks and carobs.

II

In this small country of Palestine, this so-called Holy Land, there had been heralded the Gospel of the grace of God in all its pristine power and simplicity. Now, buried beneath a mass of religious ritual and fanatical tradition, the Gospel had been lost sight of. Here was, in fact, a country surfeited with religion, yet dying of spiritual sickness. History was repeating itself. There was a spiritual drought in the land. Once more the priests of Baal held high sway. The forces of evil seemed everywhere to be predominant. Instead of the silver clarion call of the Gospel, calling men everywhere to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, there was the discordant clash of false or obsolete religious systems. The call of the Spirit seemed to have been superseded by the clanging of bell-metal, or the rise and fall of the Muezzin. Proud Pharisaism and clericalism stalked side by side throughout a land where once the believers in Christ had met and worshipped in common brotherhood and equality before God.

Now, as in the days of Elijah, the religion of the senses seemed everywhere to be prevailing, something that could be seen or smelt or touched, some golden calf or image to please the senses, in absence of saving faith in an invisible Redeemer. Could it be

reasonably possible that the unchanging God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and of the Apostles might see fit to again arise and deliver, at this time, some who had not or longed not to bow the knee to Baal? What if in this and the surrounding lands there could be gathered once again, by the power of the Holy Spirit, little companies of regenerated men and women of every nationality, owning no name but His name, and subservient to no lordship but the Lordship of Christ?

Could it again be possible, despite the bitter efforts of the evil one to blot out those simple Christian truths delivered so distinctly by the Lord and His Apostles, to see men and women meeting in simple fellowship as in the days of old; doing all for love and not for power and gain; obedient to nothing but His transparent precepts; shining humbly as lights for Him amidst a "crooked and perverse generation," and guided only by Holy Writ and not by systematized ritual and traditions?

III

Thus deeply occupied, hour after hour had quickly sped away. Already the sun was dipping in the west, amidst a blaze of glory, till it seemed almost to touch the waters of the Mediterranean, tinging the rocks and knolls of Carmel with that peculiar mauve and delicate pink so characteristic of these eastern sunsets. Reluctant to quit the long day's vigil with a heart still burdened and undecided, the eye was directed, at the very last minute to a passage of Scripture in the book of Isaiah:

"Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.

"Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. . . . Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples. . . . And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8. 12-20).

Whatever these words once conveyed to Israel, they now become a living message to one's own soul. It seemed almost as though the Lord Himself had spoken audibly through the lips of the prophet, and a passage, passed over at other times almost unnoticed now burned with a new meaning. If Palestine were to be helped in her dire spiritual need, it would not be by human

organisation, under which the land was already groaning, nor by "a confederacy" of human effort; for "should not a people seek unto their God for the living to the dead?"

It was "the Lord of Hosts" Himself Who must needs be exalted before the public gaze. It was the "testimony," the written Word of God, for which the people of the land were starving; for, "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." These grave and solemn words spoken by the prophet in ages past was precisely the message for this day. In other words, Palestine's burning need, both then and now, was for a living message from a living God, faithfully proclaimed by living, regenerated witnesses.

I V

The lights of Haifa were beginning to straggle out along the foot of Carmel, before the steep ascent of the mountain face could be accomplished. The peeping stars, too, came out singly, then in brilliant clusters over a Galilee beginning to settle itself down for another night of slumber. But amongst the many inhabitants of the land, one heart, at least, burned with a new hope and confidence begotten through the day's vigil on Carmel.

Many years have passed since then. But the hope kindled that day still lives on; a hope which the passage of time, with all its testings and vicissitudes, has only served to strengthen and fulfil.



JERUSALEM
THE DAMASCUS GATE (Chap. I)

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24

THE GUEST CHAMBER
A TYPICAL UPPER CHAMBER OF A HOUSE AT RAMALLAH

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JERUSALEM

A SCENE IN THE OLDEST STREET (Chap. i)

A JEWISH MARKET





BETHLEHEM

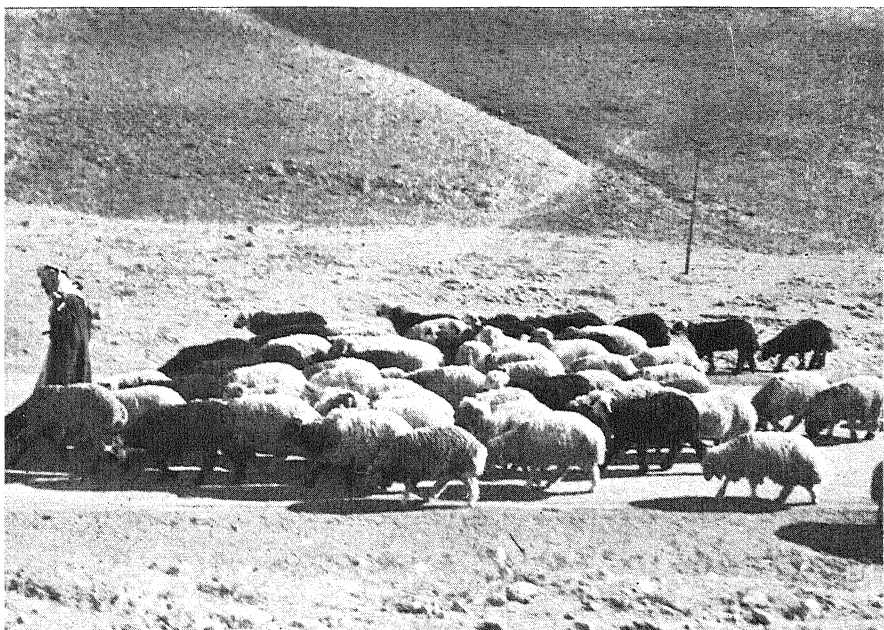
LIFE IN THE STREET OF THE STAR (Chap. vii)

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LEADS, BUT NEVER DRIVES

A PALESTINE SHEPHERD FOLLOWED BY HIS FLOCK

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TIBERIAS
AND THE SEA OF GALILEE (Chap xv i)

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AN EARLY RISER
A FISHERMAN IN THE SEA OF GALILEE (Chap xv ii)

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CHAPTER III

Towards the Dead Sea

I

PUNCTUALLY at six o'clock our debonair chauffeur, an Arab, looking quite gay with his red tarboosh, fancy sash, and enormously wide pantaloons, draws up at the door, and salutes us with a hearty "Naharak-sied!" which means, "May your day be bright!"

This morning we are about to plunge from the crisp autumn atmosphere of Jerusalem, 2700 feet above sea level, down to the tropical plain of Jericho, 1300 feet below. Little more than twenty miles separates these two places.

Traversing first the North Wall of the city, we pass in succession New Gate, Damascus Gate, and the famous Solomon's Quarries, which run far under the city, from their entrance in the North Wall. The road then passes down the ancient dry moat, cut from the solid rock to protect the North Wall, which has always been the weakest point of the city's defence. In its long succession of sieges and assaults, Jerusalem has invariably been the hardest pressed along this wall, rising as it does from more or less level country.

From the north-east corner of the city wall, the road turns sharply to the right, curving downwards into the Brook Kedron. Then leaving Gethsemane on our immediate left, we begin to climb the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, and soon a very fine view of the Temple Area and the Eastern Wall presents itself.

Once over the summit of Olivet, an extraordinary panorama lies before us, different from anything we have ever seen. Looking down over the Judean Wilderness and the immense Jordan Valley over 4000 feet below us, we seem to have come suddenly upon another world. Rounding another bend at the back of the Mount of Olives, we find ourselves at Bethany, which is the last place of habitation, not counting the Inn of the Good Samaritan, between Jerusalem and the plains of Jericho.

What thoughts are conjured up in our minds by the sight of this ancient village. Here was the one place on earth, so far as we know, where the Lord received those sweet amenities of life

so often denied him on earth—sympathy, love, and quietness.

A few children gather round us, as children will the world over. Again and again we hear the familiar word "Backsheesh," reminding us of their poverty and our riches.

The name "Bethany" means "house of the poor one," perhaps a subtle reminder of the One who frequented this place, who, "though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8. 9).

Here is a boy who wants to sell us a sling, similar, we presume to the one with which David slew Goliath. It is made of black goats' hair. We give him a shilling, the price he asks, and he goes away pleased with the deal, and marvelling at our slackness in bargaining.

A local guide now joins the party, and offers to conduct us to the reputed tomb of Lazarus. We climb a narrow street, still accompanied by a crowd of children, and come to a small doorway giving admittance to the tomb. We have to descend about twenty-five steps, aided by the light of a candle, till we reach the actual sepulchre. I have never met any European who really believes this to be the actual tomb of Lazarus. But it certainly is a tomb of ancient Bethany, so imagination must do the rest.

We try to recreate the scene as pictured in the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel. Here, in this little village of Bethany, the dreaded Goliath of mankind, Death, is defeated and put to shame, by great David's Greater Son. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (John 11. 25, 26).

In that narrative in John 11 we have the vivid portrait of two sisters of Bethany who are made to live for ever in our midst; and such is the detail of local colouring, that we, too, seem to have become, momentarily, inhabitants of this ancient village. As we stand in fancy round the open tomb of Lazarus, we gain a comforting glimpse of the Lord's tender heart of love for His bereaved and sorrowing children of earth: "Jesus wept."

Best of all, we have the superb display of life triumphing over death, the sublime words of comfort spoken to the sisters of Lazarus have reverberated down the ages. Wherever bereaved hearts are wrung with grief, the only true consolation that can dispel the black helplessness of the open grave are these priceless words concerning the resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in faith in the Son of God.

II

From Bethany, the road descends rapidly with sharp turns, till we come to the so-called Fountain of the Apostles, probably the ancient Fountain of the Sun. This was the boundary line between Juda and Benjamin.

The landscape now becomes extremely desolate. It would seem that this arid barrenness of the Judean Wilderness is caused not only by the lack of moisture, but also by the presence of a thin limestone pan which covers the surface of the ground. This makes the growth of vegetation almost an impossibility, except in those cracks and crannies where the deposit has been broken through.

About half-way down to the plain we come to a hill with a peculiar red colour, and to the Inn of the Good Samaritan. What sighs of relief must have been breathed down the ages by weary travellers, who, having safely negotiated half of this hot and dangerous road, would here find rest and shelter for the oncoming night. It seems rather wonderful that there ever should have been a succession of hardy inn-keepers willing to carry on business in such a dreary place of danger and isolation.

The present keeper comes out to greet us with a smile of satisfaction, and the first question upon our lips is, "Have you any gazoose?" (lemonade).

After the fizz of opening bottles has subsided, we sit round on the rocks, and try to construct again the story of the good Samaritan. Singularly enough, the first time I travelled down to Jericho, it was my lot to pick up a man near the roadside and who was bleeding profusely from a severed artery. A piece of broken glass, not a highway robber, had been the cause of his misfortune. I hurried him off to the local apothecary at Jericho, using a car in lieu of the usual donkey.

During the past few years of Jewish-Arabic troubles, this Jericho road has been the scene of many stirring, and sometimes tragic incidents. There have been clashes between the Arabs and the Jewish lorry drivers of the Palestine Potash Company. One cannot but feel admiration for those brave fellows who have had to take such grave risks in the carrying out of their routine of duties. Here and there on the bare hillsides one notices rows of holes. These are relics of the first World War, being one-man dugouts prepared by British and A.N.Z.A.C. soldiers.

As we descend towards the plain, the road to Jericho forks. We may travel either by the new deviation, passing the Moslem

shrine of Neby Mousa (Prophet Moses), or by the old and steeper road, which is the more interesting and historic. We choose the latter, so that we may view the deep ravine, with its flow of precious water, commonly supposed to be the Brook Cherith, associated in Scripture with the prophet Elijah.

Built into, or partially carved from the perpendicular cliffs of this great gorge, is an ancient Greek Orthodox sanctuary, called the Monastery of Elijah. Parts of this convent date back to the fifth century. Rumour has it that this eagle's nest is used mainly to discipline unruly monks from far and near. If so, the fierce heat of the ravine, and its eerie isolation would be punishment enough for ordinary mortals. The monks spend much time and patience in taming wild birds, and in teaching them to dive for food on the wing.

Before reaching the plain of Jericho, we find the brook Cherith flowing almost level with, and finally across the road we are descending. The stream not only provides delightful music in this arid region, but carries a train of green fertility along its banks till it is lost amongst the gardens of Jericho below. These gardens, which are famous in history, have always been a delight to the tired eyes of the traveller emerging from the wilderness of Judea. The town itself has little to boast of apart from its gardens. Many of the inhabitants live in mere hovels, reminding one of the curse once put upon this place. However, there are a few respectable pensions, patronised by visitors who come here for warmth during the winter months. Palestine is indeed fortunate in having a tropical garden at her own back door.

As we make our way to the outskirts of the present town to the mound of ancient Jericho, we pass through luxuriant plantations of bananas, oranges, pomegranates, figs, and other trees. The mound itself proves most interesting. Here, the spade of the archaeologist, under the direction of Professor John Garstang, of Liverpool University, has lately brought to light many interesting relics and facts, some of them in direct corroboration of the city's destruction by Joshua, about 3300 years ago.

Let us examine a part of the old city wall. At first sight it looks like mud, but a closer scrutiny shows it to be constructed of large mud bricks, measuring, if one remembers rightly, about 15 inches by 9 inches. We see where a house was originally built into the top of the wall. The local guide assures us most solemnly that this was the dwelling-place of Rahab, who hid the two spies sent out from Joshua's army. As no one present could

safely contradict this lofty claim, we all kept silence. But of one thing we are sure, and that is the consistency of the Bible in all its amazing types and shadows concerning the redemptive work of Christ. Thus we notice there was protection afforded Rahab and her family beneath the scarlet line hung in the window when the city of Jericho fell. There was also protection for the Israelites on the fateful night of their departure from Egypt, beneath the blood stains placed upon the door posts and on the lintel, even as there is complete protection for every sinner of Adam's race who will lay claim to it through the crimson fountain opened up at Calvary. Always it is the same story, "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9. 22); "For the life of the flesh is in the blood . . . for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17. 11).

Much light has been thrown upon the historical events of Palestine by the discoveries of Professor Garstang made at this site. Also, the overthrow of the city by Joshua and the suddenness of the catastrophe have been clearly verified. Ovens containing burnt bread, cellars packed with oil jars, hastily abandoned household effects, different types of pottery, local and foreign coins, carved scarab beetles, and charred remains of household furniture and effects indicate clearly at what period and in what manner the city was overthrown.

Regarding the state of the walls as found upon excavation, and concerning which many questions have been asked, Professor Garstang writes as follows:

"Investigation along the west side shows continuous signs of destruction and conflagration. The outer wall suffered most, its remains falling down the slope. The inner wall is preserved only where it abuts upon the citadel, or tower, to a height of eighteen feet; elsewhere it is found largely to have fallen, together with the remains of buildings upon it, into the space between the walls which was filled with ruins and debris."

A few yards from the mound is the reputed fountain of Elisha. It is a fine spring of water which contributes not a little to the greenness and fertility of the environment. It is this water, and that from Cherith, plus the luxuriant gardens, which are the remaining assets of this once important emporium, called in Bible times "the City of Palm Trees."

In Roman days, Jericho was world-renowned for her fruits and balsams, and many chapters have been written about her by historians of the past.

III

Now we must speed away across the plains to the Dead Sea, lying south-east about eight miles distant. A clump of trees between us and the Jordan River, which lies about five miles due east, marks the site of ancient Gilgal. Here was the first camping ground of the invading Israelites under Joshua, after Jordan had been crossed. "And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day" (Josh. 5. 9).

The word "Gilgal" means "a rolling." So when the modern Jew in Jerusalem to-day refers to a horse carriage as a "galgala," he means something which rolls, literally a wheel. The Arabs call the place Jiljil, which goes to show that a local present-day name may prove a valuable clue in helping to determine the site of an ancient city.

We are now approaching the Dead Sea, which is about forty-six miles in length, and about nine and a half miles at its widest part. The northern part of the lake has an average depth of 1300 feet, while to the south it is merely a submerged plain, covered by about thirteen feet of water. Some are inclined to think that this submerged area marks the region of Sodom and Gomorrah, "the cities of the plain." Others place the sites of these cities nearer to the foot-hills of Judea. If the former assumption be correct, it would seem as though God, in His wrath, had submerged even the very sites of these wicked cities which had reached the lowest level of human guilt and depravity. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. 19. 24).

There is abundant evidence of the great part played by volcanic activity in fashioning this queer and interesting depression which claims so much attention from scientists.

Rising from the eastern shore of the lake like a brown rampart are the heights of Moab, broken here and there by a gorge, down which rivers such as the Arno flow. It was from the highest point of this range, Mount Nebo, almost opposite the northern end of the lake, that Moses viewed the Promised Land.

Many strange things have been said about the waters of the Dead Sea. While it is true that there is no sign of life in its clear, saline depths, it is also true that there is plenty of bird and coarse plant life just beyond its high-water mark, and on the hills around. The southern reaches of the sea, however, are among the most desolate parts of the earth's surface.

Speaking of bird life in Palestine, it might interest and surprise many people to know that in this apparently almost birdless land, there are over four hundred species. All of these have been collected by Professor T. Aharoni in the course of a lifetime, and are now on view in the Jewish University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. I would advise any visitor interested in bird life not to miss seeing this valuable collection, as I was informed by the Professor that this is the only collection of Palestine and Trans-jordan birds in existence; and that some of the specimens are almost irreplaceable. There is also a fine collection of animal, plant and insect life at the University.

Birds, in general, avoid those areas which have been denuded of vegetation, and seek places, mostly isolated, where trees and water abound. In Palestine, the Waters of Merom, the Jordan Valley, and the wild country of Northern Galilee are favourite haunts of birds and wild animals.

I V

Here we are on the very shores of the Dead Sea. A clean pebbly beach slopes down to the water's edge. The first impression is agreeable. The water appears clear and inviting, and we are just longing to splash and swim in its saline depths.

An enterprising seller of soft drinks, who has fixed up some awnings to shield travellers from the blazing sun, has also, with some foresight provided rough bathing-sheds and a supply of fresh water to wash the salt deposit from the body after bathing.

There is a delightful sense of comfort as we enter the water. We have no need to gasp or shudder, for the water is decidedly warm. A strange sensation of ease and buoyancy comes over one in striking out to swim, and one seems to progress without the usual effort. We feel like so many corks which cannot sink. With arms and legs properly extended we could literally sleep on the water.

Now we shall put to the test something about which we have often heard and read. So we call for an umbrella; and with this as a protection from the sun, we lie upon the water, open a booklet, and read comfortably beneath the shade. So the possibilities of Dead Sea bathing are, after all, no mere fairy tales.

Ignorance of the unwritten laws of bathing here robbed me of some enjoyment the first time I swam in the Dead Sea. Unmindful of the fact that the water is heavily impregnated, not only with salt, but also with potassium and many other minerals, I tried diving with my eyes open. I thought my sight must be injured, but the

effects soon wore off. Also, being unaware of the impromptu fresh water service of the restaurant keeper, I set off to the Jordan carrying a crust of Dead Sea mineral on my body as a souvenir, for the rest of the journey.

If you took four buckets of water from this lake, you would have approximately one bucketful, or 25 per cent solid mineral. There is, of course, no outlet from the Dead Sea, so the minerals that have been carried down by the Jordan and other rivers, for millenniums past, have all been accumulating. The size of the lake is naturally determined by the rate of evaporation.

A few years ago there was very little life in the region of this rather uncanny expanse of water; now things are changing rapidly. Upon my first visit, I happened to come across a Jew near the head of the lake, dressed in shorts, and working a theodolite beneath the shade of a huge umbrella.

"Pardon me," I said, "but do you happen to be working in connection with the proposed Palestine Potassium Company?"

"Yes," he replied in English.

"Does this happen to be your first time on the job?"

"It is," he replied.

With his permission, I took a snap, perhaps the only one ever taken of the very beginning of what might well prove to be an historic undertaking, involving vast possibilities, and which may, one day, change the financial status of Palestine and the surrounding countries. It may be that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, anticipating the future needs of an impoverished country at the time of its restoration, spoken of by all the prophets, has been silently storing up mineral wealth in the Dead Sea ready for this time.

To-day there is a thriving potassium company operating at the northern end of the lake, but only as yet in its infancy. Salt, bromine, and other minerals are also being reclaimed. This means that buildings are beginning to appear where all was once desolation.

Jewish moonlight parties also come down from Jerusalem to sail upon its waters, and to dance upon its shores. Rest homes are also beginning to make their appearance.

As we eat our sandwiches beneath the awning, and look across the placid stretch of water on which gaily-painted boats and launches are clearly reflected as they lie at anchor, we think we can foresee the Dead Sea not only as a great industrial centre, but also as a winter resort for Europe and the Near East.





A CAMEL CARAVAN PASSING ALONG THE
SHORE OF THE DEAD SEA

Photo· Exclusive News Agency Ltd.

CHAPTER IV

A Picnic at the Jordan

I

FROM the Dead Sea to the Pilgrim's Bathing Place on Jordan, the road wanders in a north-easterly direction across an arid plain thickly crusted with salt. Studded here and there, are peculiar sugar-loaf hillocks, cut into a variety of fantastic shapes by the erosive action of wind-driven sand.

Descending a low terrace, we enter the belt of foliage which marks the winding course of the river. Like the Nile, the Jordan overflows its banks at a certain season, due to the melting of the snow on Mount Hermon. Many species of trees grow in profusion in the immediate vicinity of the river. These include willows, tamarisks, white-flowering junipers and poplars, with an abundance of shrubbery and wild native flowers.

In the spring-time the valley is brightened by a galaxy of these flowers. Scarlet anemones, phlox, narcissi, cyclamen, poppies, and a host of other species, all intermingle. Birds, including the pretty crested kingfisher, flit to and fro, and even the hum of bees is not wanting, to make us feel at home again after the strange desolation of the plain.

As one might expect, this foliage along the river bank affords excellent cover for most of the wild species of animals still existing in Palestine. At any moment you might surprise a sly old fox or jackal. Sometimes a coney or even a wild boar will start from cover, or a slim-legged gazelle speeds away like the wind. After sunset you may even hear the raucous cry of a prowling hyena, which gives one an eerie feeling of insecurity.

Facing northwards, the hills of the Judean Wilderness on our left pile themselves tier upon tier, in utter barrenness, till they merge finally into Mount Olivet, on the distant sky-line, some four thousand feet above the level of the Jordan.

Between us and the town of Jericho lies the little mound of Gilgal, where Joshua set up the twelve stones, one for each tribe, taken from the bed of Jordan when the waters were rolled back by divine decree, as far as the city Adam. These stones, set up at Gilgal, were for a perpetual memorial to the children of Israel of

their miraculous passage of the Jordan, and their entrance into the Promised Land. "When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. . . . That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord that it is mighty" (Joshua 4. 21-24).

But the believer of this present dispensation of grace sees in this cairn of stones another and more beautiful type of himself. For, having been discovered and brought to light, from the depths of sin and degradation, through the rolling back of death and judgment at the Cross (of which the rolling back of Jordan is but a well-known figure), the believer is now a "living stone," built into the Church, as a perpetual memorial before the angelic hosts of heaven, of God's omnipotent love and power in saving the sons of Adam's fallen race.

As we begin to approach the bank of the river, the foliage through which we are passing becomes denser. Suddenly we glimpse the stream itself at the site of the Pilgrim's Bathing Place. Before the partial collapse of the Greek Orthodox Church following the Bolshevik regime in Russia, thousands of Russian pilgrims came annually here to bathe. The practice of making a pilgrimage to the banks of the Jordan dates from the early centuries of the Christian era. It is firmly believed that special blessing results from bathing in the place where our Lord is said to have been baptized. Dressed in their white burial shrouds, pilgrims bathe here with ecstatic satisfaction, and carry away water from the Jordan as a sacred souvenir.

Authorities differ as to whether this is the actual site of the Lord's baptism; some, including Condor, place the site of Bethabara further up the river.

What is certain is that somewhere, in the lower reaches of this river, the Son of God permitted Himself to be buried in baptism, typical of that cruel and relentless flood which was later to surge over Him at Calvary.

II

A thriving business is carried on at this bathing-place during certain seasons of the year by a restaurant keeper, who, I believe, is a Greek. We sit down at one of his little open-air tables under the trees in anticipation of a roughly-prepared meal followed by tea or lemonade, for which a good stiff price is paid. No doubt the tariff is on the sliding scale principle, and it makes all the

difference whether the traveller be an "Ingleze" (Englishman), or whether he be a "son of the land." But it is not every day one has the opportunity of picnicking on the banks of the river Jordan beneath the pleasant shade.

To-day we find the site of the bathing-place almost deserted, and the restaurant keeper, with his family, is evidently settling down for a lean time during the hot summer months. To us, however, this only adds to the quiet charm of his Robinson Crusoe kind of life. We notice that his dwelling-place is a mere shack, built of old boards, pieces of tin and sticks, and is set very high on stilts, perhaps nine or ten feet above the ground. It is reached by a crazy kind of ladder, which brings to mind the warning of the Prophet Jeremiah about the flooding of this rather dangerous river. His question, too, has a deeper significance, spiritually, for the careless unbeliever, basking leisurely and unprepared in a world of unbelief by the banks of the river of time. For him, too, the question will one day arise, "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"—that is, when the real Jordan of death and judgment will rise to inundate him with its devastating and chilly waters.

But, having now called for "shai," the Arabic word for tea, at once the open-air restaurant returns to life, and with some amusement, we watch the ensuing preparations. A woman, presumably the wife of the proprietor, proceeds to waylay a wandering goat to secure the necessary milk. A child gathers some sticks from the river bank, while the father rakes up the embers to boil the kettle. He then cuts slices of rough bread, upon which he spreads flakes of white cheese made from goat's milk.

Whilst waiting for the meal to be served, our eyes began to wander from branch to branch of the trees overhead. Much to our astonishment, each tree harbours a monstrosity in the shape of a grinning wild animal. The explanation is simple. It would appear that the restaurant keeper is something of a hunter in his spare time, of which, no doubt, he has abundance. So he has taken pains to preserve, for public exhibition, some of these trophies of the chase. But his efforts as a taxidermist are atrocious. Bloated and bedraggled jackals, foxes and stoats, stare from the branches overhead, in a most unnatural manner. Best of all is an hyena, which seems to hold pride of place in the gruesome collection. It so happens that the hyena, even in the prime of life, is a grinning crafty creature which no one wishes to meet after dark. But this one, with its distorted body, falling hair, and eyes staring fixedly from its unnatural position in a tree, is a

veritable fiend. To the restaurant man, no doubt, it is an object of joy and pride.

III

The Jordan River, at this place, is not rapid in its flow, and its waters in these lower reaches is muddy and yellow in appearance. A bottleful of water, when allowed to settle, deposits a considerable amount of silt. The river varies in width from seventy to about one hundred and fifty feet, and is from five to twelve feet deep. A few rowing boats, owned by our host, ply on the river for hire, and for a small sum we may row up stream to the place where the Israelites are supposed to have crossed the river, under the leadership of Joshua.

"And as they that bare the Ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the Ark were dipped in the brim of the water (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest), that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan" (Joshua 3. 15, 16).

The Ark, of course, typifies Christ, and it is interesting to note that fourteen centuries after this event, the real Ark, in the person of Christ Himself, approached the Jordan in this locality to request baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

In this case, however, true to typical teaching, the waters of Jordan did not flow back, but onward over Him, a prophetic and fitting type of His coming death and resurrection. In other words, while rolling back the flood of judgment for the human race as far back as the first man, Adam, He Himself suffered that flood to overflow His sinless head at Calvary. Moreover, as this typical river has its course in the lowest part of the earth's surface, so the Redeemer descended to the lowest depths of sorrow and judgment—to the very bed of the river—to lift us up as monuments of His everlasting love and grace.

A little below the bathing-place, we happened upon the most primitive human habitation we had ever seen. Propped up on posts, like the house of the restaurant man, to avoid the flood level, it was, in fact, a mere bundle of sticks, entered by a small hole underneath, just big enough for a human to crawl through. Even more pathetic, was the fact that it was the abode of a woman; one of those poor Russian pilgrims, stranded, in all probability, in Palestine during the first Great War. Dear old soul! She had at least one consolation in her poverty. She was living near the

place where her Lord had been baptized. Here, indeed, was zeal, with, it may be, very little knowledge; a touching faith in that which had no divine sanction, yet we could not but be deeply interested in the old lady, who, however, could not speak a word of English.

I V

Did we lay ourselves open to a charge of inconsistency when, upon taking our departure from the Jordan late that afternoon we filled two bottles with muddy water from the river to take away? There was, however, no thought of blessing or magic attached to this particular liquid. It was just water, proof of which was that one bottleful was imbibed by mistake, by the chauffeur, before we had reached Jerusalem. But it certainly was water taken from the most unique river in the world.

When, some months later, I gave a little of it to an old gentleman on board ship, who was travelling from one of the Dominions, he showed tremendous gratitude, and tears stood in his eyes. I almost began to feel guilty. Was I aiding and abetting superstition? Also, was this old gentleman amongst the number who go through life ascribing efficacy and virtue to things that are in themselves of no account? Or, did he merely value a link with a river which holds such a prominent place in the sacred narrative?

The Jordan is, of course, the chief river of Palestine. It rises far in the north, beyond the modern boundary of Palestine, one of its principal tributaries, emerging as a clear bubbling fountain from a cave at Banias, the Cæsarea Philippi of the Bible, at the foot of Hermon. It is further augmented by another spring from Tel el Kady, and another tributary flowing straight down from Hermon, called the Hasbani. After uniting, these flow through the swampy region of the Waters of Merom, called Lake Huleh, which the Jews are hoping to drain; then on to the Lake of Galilee. Flowing still southwards, but with many windings, it is joined by the Jarmuk, which turns the turbines for the great Reutenberg Electric Scheme. Later, it is joined by the Jobbak, and finally flows into the Dead Sea far below the level of the Mediterranean.

This river, symbolic in Scripture, as we have seen, is unique in every way. Its origin is peculiar, it flows exactly from north to south; it forms the eastern boundary for the most interesting country in the world; it flows through the lowest depression on the earth's surface, and finally loses itself in the strangest sheet of water in existence.

CHAPTER V

Links with the Past

I

SITUATED some ten miles north of Jerusalem, on the great North Road, is one of the highest villages in Southern Palestine, Bereh, which is the ancient Beeroth; and for two years past, we have experienced its invigorating climate and extensive view.

A Moslem from the village, who runs a business in New York, has already two up-to-date houses to his credit in his native Bereh, and is now contemplating the building of a third. His wife and her young children guard the family interests here in ancient Benjamin, while her aspiring capitalistic husband piles up wealth in New York. Separation may be hard, but the prospect of wealth makes it apparently well worth while.

From the top flat of one of these new stone houses we command a view of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, with a great number of Biblical sites in between.

To-day the air has been keen and invigorating, even though the winter sun has travelled all day across a cloudless sky. Now, like a ball of fire, he plunges into the distant waters of the placid Mediterranean, and all the Judean hills are flushed with those delicate tints, so characteristic of the Eastern sunsets.

Across the Jordan valley, and opposite the setting sun, the continuous brown rampart formed by the Hills of Moab and Ephraim catch up the last direct rays of sunlight, every gorge and crevice being distinctly delineated in the clear atmosphere.

A band of fellaheen, arguing and gesticulating as they wander slowly homeward with their heavily-laden donkeys, begin to quicken their pace in anticipation of the oncoming darkness; for experience has taught them, that in these stirring times, a good stone dwelling-house, with a stoutly-barred door, is about the best place to be in after night has fallen.

In another hour lights will be twinkling from the city of Jerusalem, and on the Mount of Olives we shall see the Russian Tower silhouetted against the sky-line like some gigantic upward-pointing finger, till it fades into oblivion.

These hours of sunrise and sunset are the best for viewing the landscape of Palestine. How many unfortunate tourists, not knowing this, and dragging themselves breathlessly and fatigued at the heels of a hurrying guide, in the full glare of a Palestine day, have left the country without ever having caught the real spirit and beauty of the land.

A hundred yards or so from our look-out balcony, a Union Jack, looking somewhat out of keeping with the scene, flutters from the flagpole of an official building. In a few minutes it will be hauled down for the night, as if almost to suggest that even the flag of Britain can be no guarantee against the machinations of the wily maurader, who works by stealth when darkness covers the land. Before it flutters again in the morning breeze, to show that Britain rules at least by day, who knows how many dark deeds may have been perpetrated between Dan and Beersheba, by prowlers with millenniums of maurading history as their natural background.

II

This reminds us that there was no Union Jack flying in Bereh on that memorable occasion when the wily inhabitants of this and three other villages deceived the Commander-in-Chief of the Israelite army by a clever ruse. Joshua, tricked by outward appearances, did a bad day's business for his nation, when, acting precipitately, without waiting for Divine guidance, he concluded a treaty with a people who had been marked out by Jehovah for utter extermination. "And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. And Joshua made a league with them to let them live" (Josh. 9. 14, 15). The results were disastrous for the future welfare of Israel.

Like the proverbial bad apple in the case, the Hivites of the land were later to become a source of spiritual infection in the midst of that special nation through which God had planned to bring blessing to the whole world. We should neither hurriedly condemn the decree of an all-wise Creator calling for their complete extermination, nor should we palliate the leniency or unwatchfulness of Joshua in sparing these people whose cup of iniquity was already full.

The presence of these heathen tribes in the very midst of Israel assisted in no small degree the final corruption and downfall of the Jewish nation.

In God's governmental dealings with mankind, it is wise to "behold both the goodness and the severity of God."

III

There is a most interesting spring in the village of Bereh, which must have played a leading part in the history of the place. Indeed, the very name "Beeroth" has to do with wells. In the West, we bring water to our towns and villages. In the East our towns are brought to the water. It is a case of no water, no inhabitants.

Near the spring are the remains of an ancient and well-built khan, also rich in historic associations; for Bereh has the distinction of being the first halting-place for caravans journeying from Jerusalem to the north. If these stones could speak, they might, amongst other things, tell of the night when consternation reigned in the hearts of Joseph and Mary when they found that their Son Jesus was missing from the company, having been left behind in the city.

The water of this delicious fountain flows as cool and as sweet to-day as when the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob paused here to allay their thirst as they passed from time to time up and down this main and central highway. With Bethel, the great trysting place for these three worthies, less than two miles distant, such a noted spring would be a roadside rendezvous for them and their children.

A hefty woman from the village carries us each day four gallons of this drinking water in a huge water-pot, which in itself is sufficient for a burden. She carries this water upon her head, travelling up hill, and finally up two flights of steps, without even pausing for a rest.

Somehow, we can't help feeling, as we pour this cool and sparkling liquid into our glasses, that we are drinking with the patriarchs of old. Standing upon our table may be seen an earthenware tumbler picked up by the writer in distant Ur of the Chaldees on the banks of the Euphrates. So, with water from the spring at Bereh, plus a tumbler which might possibly have been the household property of Abraham's mother, we feel almost in the family circle.

The surrounding scene serves to deepen this impression. A glance downward reveals a man in flowing robes, ploughing his field with a primitive wooden plough to which is yoked an ox and an ass. Those women, baking unleavened bread on a curved iron girdle upon the flat roof-top are doing exactly as their ancestors did before them.

The two or three incongruous objects in the setting are those

modern houses of the New York capitalist, the luxuriant eucalyptus trees growing just across the way, and the Union Jack just alluded to. But are they really incongruous? Does not the eucalyptus remind us of the word "A.N.Z.A.C.," and the Union Jack of that far-flung empire which Almighty God has seen fit, in His immutable counsels and irresistible designs, to link with the most unique race which this world has, or probably ever will see—the Jews!

Talking of the patriarchs arouses in our minds a somewhat puzzling and humiliating query. "God, Who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. 1. 1, 2). But does it not seem as if these giants of the past in many ways possessed a stronger grip on God through faith than, perhaps, the majority of people in Christendom to-day? Was not this because, through some great leap of faith, they cleared the space of centuries and millenniums, and, as in the case of righteous Abraham or David or Isaiah, they saw Christ, the Eternal Son of God, coming to Bethlehem, crucified, risen, glorified, and coming again with power?

I V

Here is a pretty little story about the Bereh of to-day which is worth relating.

Not far from the spring there lives a fellah woman in a humble dwelling of stone. Daily, whether in the home, beneath the vines or in the field, she carries on her tasks in common with her fellow villagers.

During the first Great War, it was the custom of these village women to sell fruit and vegetables beside the roadside to British soldiers camped in the vicinity. One day a British sergeant strolled along to make a purchase. There was something in the appearance of one of these women which arrested his attention. A stranger in a strange land, he was amazed to have the impression, growing steadily stronger, that he had seen the face of this woman before, but where? "Was it?— Could it be possible?" Again their eyes met, and a startling revelation dawned upon him. Now he was sure of something. Stepping forward, he proffered her his hand, and uttered a name that must have sent a thrill of astonishment through her very soul, and this is the story:

Many years ago a young Moslem set out from Bereh to seek his

fortune in America. Being refused admittance to that country, he turned back to Liverpool, and found employment there in a city restaurant. Here he met and fell in love with a young English girl, whom he finally induced to marry him and return with him to his native land of Palestine. Utterly confused and bewildered by her totally new surroundings, she resolved, none the less, with true British fortitude, to adapt herself to her new way of life. This she did so successfully that she earned a just repute as a faithful village housewife, and as a worker in the field.

Now hard times had come, and her husband had died. This British sergeant who chanced to stroll along was her own cousin, and by this accident of meeting the mystery of her whereabouts had been discovered. Stirred by this romantic reunion, and also by her present need, he offered with gallant impulse to return with her to England when the war should be over. But though her position seemed to him forlorn, nothing could induce this modern Ruth to forsake the company of her mother-in-law. Reluctantly the sergeant bade her farewell, leaving her to live out her life in the land of her adoption. The prospects of the woman again brightened. Married again to a kinsman of her former husband, she still continues to pick figs and grapes and pomegranates in the land of Benjamin, and mingles with the sun-browned daughters who draw water from the ancient spring at Bereh.

CHAPTER VI

A Walk to Bethlehem

I

FOR richness in Bible history and for memories of the past, where can be found such a road as those five miles of uphill and downhill, which separate Jerusalem from the town of Bethlehem?

Leaving Jerusalem before sunrise by the Jaffa gate, we pass the flank of the grimly-impressive Citadel of David on our left, and proceed down the slope leading to the Valley of Hinnom and the immense Pool of Gihon.

Truly, Palestine is a land of the early riser, for even at this hour the swarthy fellaheen, with their heavily-laden donkeys, have almost finished the procession from Bethlehem and the surrounding villages. They have been bringing produce for the morning market, and now march along with jaunty air and swinging gait, clad in bedraggled flowing garments, and wearing enormous home-made shoes improvised from old rubber tyres.

Here come women of Bethlehem, some of them easily distinguished by the tall white headdress peculiar to that town. Many are heavily laden with assorted farm produce, including live chickens, bowls of leban, or baskets of eggs, balanced with unconscious nicety upon the head. Each has the gait of a duchess. Sometimes a baby is swung in a satchel at the back, leaving the arms free for other purposes.

As we drop down into the valley of Hinnom, Mount Zion, with its walls and towers, looms more and more majestically above us. Indeed, it is only by obtaining this view from the bottom of Hinnom, that one can really appreciate the height and formidability of this ancient fortress of Zion.

We are now at the Pool of Gihon, in the very bed of the valley, in which a dozen browned-skinned Arab boys are diving and splashing in the green, suspicious-looking dregs of water left from the winter rains. Harmful bacteria has no terrors for them. The huge pool is really formed from surface water trapped during winter in the upper part of the valley by a dam of masonry, over which the road to Bethlehem now carries us. In former times

the upper Pool of Mamillah,* still functioning, was joined by an underground conduit leading to Gihon below. A few years ago, during road construction, this conduit was exposed. It was extraordinarily hard in texture and extremely difficult to cut through.

Before ascending from the valley, let us pause a moment and examine that perpendicular rocky face which flanks the Valley of Hinnom opposite Zion. What scenes of peace and blessing and what cruel ravages of war it has looked down upon during the millenniums of history! Here, under the frown of this natural rocky face, were enacted those disgraceful pagan rites of child sacrifice. But the fires of Moloch brought down the deep displeasure of the God of Israel, and this glade of beauty was transformed into the burning rubbish-tip of Gehenna, that ghastly symbol of the future punishment which awaits the children of disobedience.

As we begin to ascend from Gihon we encounter on our immediate right the houses of the pioneer Jewish settlement, founded by Sir Moses Montefiore. Unless we look carefully we shall miss an object of great archæological interest. Winding amongst the houses, on the hill-face, one may trace the ancient aqueduct which once brought water from the Pools of Solomon beyond Bethlehem to the Temple Area in Jerusalem. Its masonry is still hard and well preserved, and the water-piping, heavily encrusted on the inside with ages of lime deposit, is visible in places where the cement casing has been broken through.

Passing the Ophthalmic Hospital of St. John, than which there is no busier or more useful institution in Jerusalem, we soon ascend from the valley and find ourselves once more on a level with the City Wall across the valley. Looking back, we have a most impressive view of the city from the south. Mount Zion, the city ramparts, the intervening Valley of Hinnom, are all before us as we face the north, while to our right, on the east of the city, is the Mount of Olives.

Continuing, we now skirt the Mount of Evil Counsel on our left, on which are the Roman ruins of the reputed house of Caiaphas, the high priest. That solitary tree near the summit, bent fantastically with the wind, is the identical one—so the local guide solemnly assures the tourist—on which the remorseful Judas hanged himself!

*The upper Pool of Mamillah is still in an almost perfect state of preservation, and contains its supply of water, used now only for watering the streets, etc.

We are now out on the open road to Bethlehem, which runs straight, for some distance, across the Plain of Rephaim. On this plain David twice fought against the Philistines. Who, of all the kings, had more critical moments in his life, than this remarkable man of war and peace? Yet the hand of God which guided him to the throne brought him safely through all dangers to die peacefully in his bed.

We will not linger to pick the wild flowers which grow in myriads all along this plain. In some places the scarlet anemones, pink cyclamen and blue irises, to say nothing about scores of other varieties, seem to paint patches of oriental carpet on the plain. Olive trees grow here and there along the wayside, with vineyards and gardens enclosed by stone hedges. Here is an ancient well close by the roadside from which travellers have refreshed themselves and their camels for ages past. It is called the Well of the Magi.

The road now begins to wind and undulate. Not far beyond us is a saddle, on the summit of which stands a monastery surrounded by a stone wall. This is Mar Elyas. The Greek monks will tell you that on this spot Elijah lay beneath a tree when he fled from the wicked Jezebel, and was fed by the angels. They will even show you the depression left in the rock upon which he lay when he was so cast down in spirit as to request the Lord to take away his life.

II

But what is this stone seat by the wayside, just on the summit of the ridge? Unlike anything in the neighbourhood it seems to be quite modern. There is an inscription on the seat, which tells us that it was erected by the widow of the late artist, Holman Hunt, in memory of her husband. But why erect a seat in such a place? Let us sit down and refresh ourselves a little, while we view the landscape, and perhaps we shall discover the answer.

The road from Jerusalem to Beersheba and the south, part of which we are now travelling, is one of the ancient highways of the world. Day in and day out, for ages past, it has been traversed by patriarchs and peasants, shepherds and their flocks, by invading armies and disheartened fugitives.

Along this road there came from the south one day the patriarch Abraham with his son Isaac. To any but this man of faith, surely this journey would have been as melancholy as it was hopeless; for God, Whom he had learned to trust implicitly, and Who

had gone before him all the way from his home on the banks of the distant Euphrates, had now demanded the sacrifice of his beloved son. Coming to this saddle in the road, after passing through Bethlehem, which is the ancient Ephrath, father and son would here catch their first glimpse of the intended place of sacrifice, the Mount Moriah, upon which, at a later date, the City of Jerusalem was to spread itself; so, upon this memorial seat we have these words engraved: "And lifting up his eyes, he beheld the place afar off."

Arriving at the solemn place of sacrifice, Abraham prepares to offer his beloved son, believing that the God Who gave could raise him up again. "For because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice. So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba" (Gen. 22. 16-19).

So, in righteous Abraham, we, too, inherit a blessing, since nineteen centuries later, on the highest spur of this very same Moriah, God offered up His own Beloved Son, Who, as one of Abraham's posterity, according to the flesh, became the perfect Sacrifice for the sins of all who were willing to believe.

For the Jew, as well as for the Christian, this locality of Abraham's sacrifice is the most sacred spot on earth. Though their succession of glorious temples, which for long years adorned the place, have been swept into oblivion, nothing can suppress the national yearning of the Jews to see another House of the Lord crowning the summit of Moriah. Nor is this a vain hope, as the last eight chapters of the Prophet Ezekiel clearly show.

But the sacrificial offerings of this glorious temple will no longer be the finger posts pointing a disobedient nation forward to the cross of Calvary. They will, on the contrary, serve as a constant reminder to an Israel, now converted and enlightened, that on this sacred Moriah there has been offered, once for all, the true Lamb of God, "which taketh away the sin of the world."

The view from here, looking either north or south, is indeed striking. On the left, facing south towards Bethlehem, can be seen quite near at hand the wild and arid summits and undulations of the Judean Wilderness. There, looking like a truncated cone,

is the conspicuous Frank Mountain, site of one of Herod's palaces. Beyond the great depression of the Jordan lie the mountain ram-parts of Moab, with the highest point, Mount Nebo. The range runs parallel with the Dead Sea, and extends farther southward towards the Sinai Peninsula. From our present point of vantage we can look right down into that strange depression known as the Ghor or Jordan Valley.

III

We shall now continue our journey to Bethlehem. The road descends from the saddle, and, after a few more twists and undulations we begin to approach the outskirts of the town.

Is there any true believer, knowing only some of the events which have taken place in this picturesque and historic place, who could approach such a site for the first time without a quickening of the pulse and a growing intensity of expectation?

But before coming to the rise on which the town of Bethlehem stands, we pass a small square building with a domed roof, which stands right on the roadside. In a small antechamber a number of Orthodox Jews with furry hats and long side-curls sit chatting together in Hebrew. The building, which is rather rough and unpretentious, seems almost familiar to most travellers who see it for the first time. This is, indeed, no ordinary shrine, seeing it is revered by the people of Palestine's three great religions—Christians, Jews, and Moslems.

Again we have to cross in thought the gulf of time, and picture another of the patriarchs traversing this ancient highway. This time the traveller is journeying from Bethel to Beersheba in the south. Just at this point he is forced to halt with his party. Soon his heart is wrung with bitterest grief. Ere he can enter the town of Bethlehem, his beloved Rachel travails and dies by the roadside. A life has been given and a life taken; and the curse pronounced at Eden has again been vindicated upon one of Eve's posterity. "And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour . . . And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: and this is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day" (Gen. 35. 16-20).

The present tomb of Rachel is not very ancient, dating probably from the time of the Crusaders, and built upon the site or sites of more ancient buildings. Being close beside this important

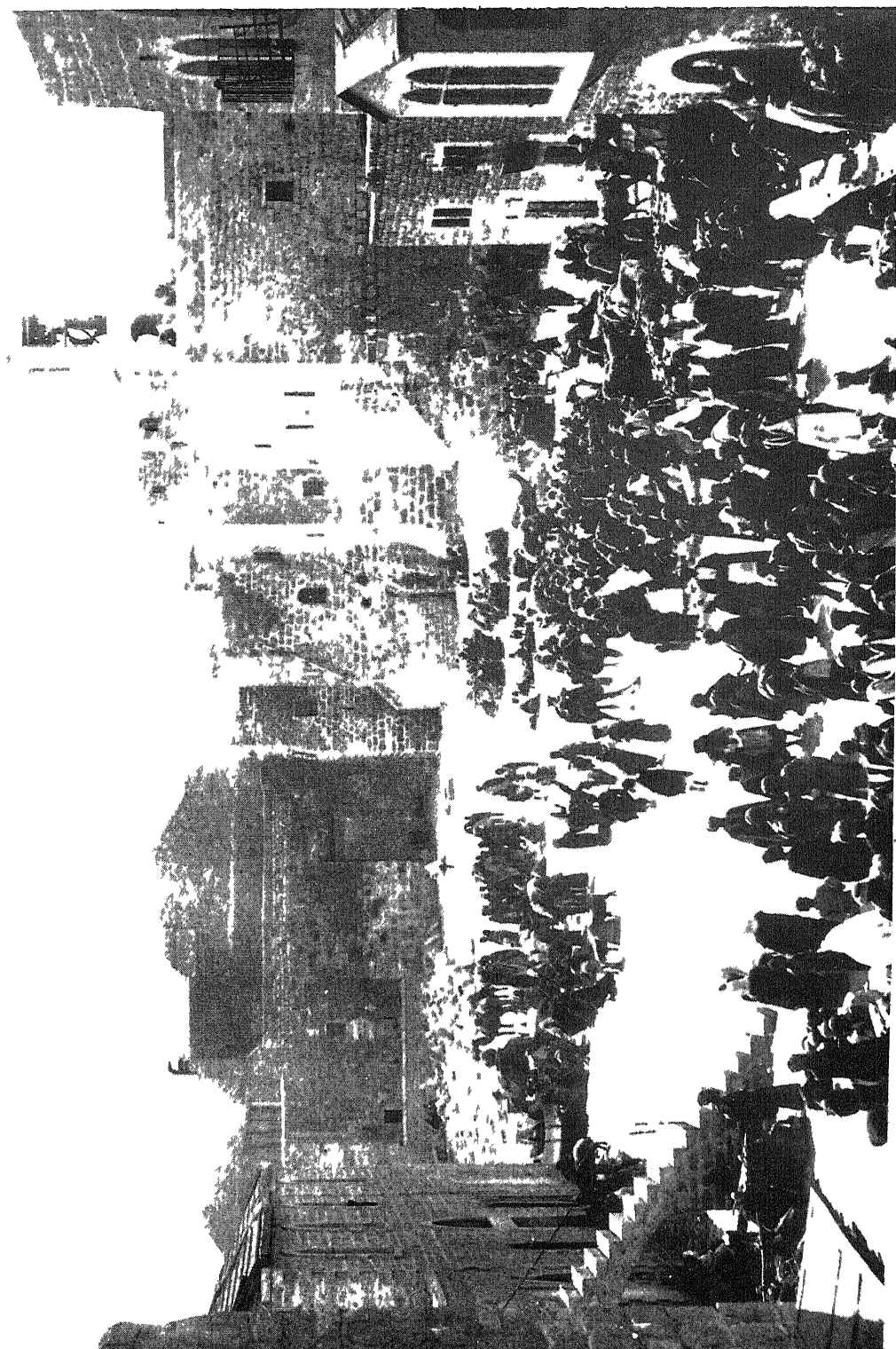
highway, it has been thought that the Prophet Jeremiah might have represented Rachel as weeping for the sad procession of Jewish captives as they wended sorrowfully past her tomb towards the distant Babylon. At a much later date, the massacre of the infants by order of Herod, in close proximity to her tomb, Rachael is again made, by figure, the sorrowful spectator of the scene.

Here we have a delightful sidelight thrown upon Jewish nationalism, showing how these national heroes and heroines of the past still seemed to live on in the minds of the people. Thus, in times of stress and difficulty the people seemed to draw much inspiration from the supposed fact that their loved ones still watched over their affairs with a sympathy denied them by their foreign invaders. So it comes about that for thirty-seven centuries, the daily wayfarer, passing beside this venerated landmark, has his thoughts deflected to the wonderful past.

A slight upward rise in the road brings us at last to the town of Bethlehem. The inhabitants are mostly Christian, with a sprinkling of Moslems, and no Jews. In refinement, dress, and industry, the Bethlehemites are above the average of the country. The town itself, being on a rise, is compactly built, and probably in shape and size resembles much the original Bethlehem. The slopes and terraces, leading down to the plains below, are nicely terraced; and ancient olive trees, figs, and vines grow in profusion. One main street crowns the ridge, with other narrower streets branching off to the right and left.

Besides farming operations, carried on in the fields around, the town helps to support itself by the manufacture of souvenirs, especially from olive wood and mother-of-pearl shell. It is interesting to watch the deft movements of the workers as they file from the shell delicate ornaments, including the five-pointed star of David. The people of the town are very friendly, and the women, though polite and modest, are not afraid to converse with strangers, of whom, no doubt, they see many.

If you scan the faces of the passers-by you will notice now and again a pair of blue eyes, or a mop of light or reddish hair; and if you cared to enquire the reason for this somewhat unusual phenomenon, you would likely hear the story of how, many centuries ago, numbers of the Crusaders, despairing of ever again seeing their homes or loved ones in Europe, settled down amongst the inhabitants of Bethlehem. So an occasional pair of blue eyes or a mop of auburn hair is but the relic of a remote past.





BETHLEHEM

PILGRIMS GATHERED AT THE MARKET PLACE, SHOWING THE CHURCH OF
THE NATIVITY ON THE RIGHT (Chap vii)

Photo : Exclusive News Agency Ltd.

○ *LITTLE town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie !
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by :
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light ;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.*

*For Christ is born of Mary ;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.*

*How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given !
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming ;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him, still
The dear Christ enters in.*

Phillips Brooks

Bethlehem

I

POLITENESS to strangers is a characteristic of the Palestinian. We are traversing one of the narrow streets of Bethlehem, and, by chance, encounter the gaze of a man and his wife seated in the street in front of their own doorway. Now most of us, no doubt, have found by experience it is fairly safe, no matter in what part of the world we are, to confer a smile upon a stranger whom we happen to meet. The magical effect upon this man and his wife is instantaneous. They rise to their feet immediately, bow, and touching first the forehead, then the region of the heart, greet us with a "T'faddalu," which means usually, "Help yourself," but on this occasion "Enter," or "Come in." Probably we have never set eyes on one another before. The invitation is frank and spontaneous, likewise our acceptance.

The low, arched doorway we pass through is stoutly built; the door itself has massive hinges, and is thickly studded with iron bolts as if for defensive purposes. The door is made doubly secure at night by a heavy lock and a stout wooden beam which slips into two niches behind the door. We used to wonder, when first we went to Palestine, why these private houses should be barricaded in this way. In the stirring years that followed, we found by experience that it is wise to trust the good sense of these local people, and that there is usually some intelligent reason for what they do.

A glance round the big oblong room is enough to convince us that, whatever truth there may be in the saying "An Englishman's home is his castle," it certainly could be applied literally to the home of a Palestinian. The walls are thick, and either plastered or whitewashed. There are several small windows heavily barred and without glass, situated high up from the ground to ensure privacy. In winter the windows are protected by shutters. The ceiling is vaulted and supported by groined arches. In all probability this house is typical of the houses of Bethlehem in Christ's day on earth. Here and there we notice small round holes or deep recesses in the walls. These holes are the entrances for

bins, built into the walls for the storage of various kinds of cereals. They have corresponding holes near the floor level for drawing out the wheat or barley as required by the housewife. From another round aperture a pigeon peeps out unperturbed from its nest.

In one large recess we see a pile of neatly-folded bedding and bolsters, to be taken out at night and spread on mats upon the floor. Thus the living room of the day becomes the sleeping room of the night. In the richer homes there may be a special guest chamber and more privacy for certain members of the family. In a poorer home one room may have to serve, not only for the family, but for the animals as well. There is usually a dais, or raised platform, reserved for the household. A small light is kept burning during the night. The idea seems to be that everything a man possesses should be safely housed and barricaded during the hours of darkness, and one can easily understand the head of the house being most unwilling to unbar his door once the household has settled down for the night. "Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee" (Luke 11. 7).

But let us pay some attention to our impromptu host and hostess. Having ushered us to our seats, they keep up a running fire of salutations such as: "Welcome!" "You have honoured us," "How are you?" "We hope you are well." "How is your family?" "We hope your children are well." "Is your business prosperous?"

They pass round sweets or preserved fruits, then, after further conversation, regale us with tiny cups of strong Turkish coffee. Our host empties his cup with one powerful and sonorous sip. Still the compliments continue to flow, for according to the laws of etiquette, everything must be for the well-being and advantage of the visitor. They are politeness personified. "We are not worthy of your honour." "What we offer you is of no consideration."

The house of our host is built upon the eastern shoulder of the eminence on which Bethlehem stands. A glimpse through the vine-clustered trellis-work reveals a delightful view of the Shepherd's Fields below us in the distance. We prepare to take leave of our kind friends. This calls for a fresh outburst. "Come again." "You have indeed honoured us."

We shake hands as though departing from life-long acquaintances. They wave after us. "Go in peace." Then, finally, "We hope you will live to carry your children's children in your arms."

So much for the hospitality and open-heartedness of the East, which, by comparison, seems to show up us Britishers as being rather curt, starchy and suspicious.

II

But here we are at the celebrated Church of the Nativity. It is about the oldest church building in existence, certainly the oldest in Palestine, having been erected by Helena, mother of the Roman Cæsar, Constantine. How it has escaped the ravages of time and warfare seems almost a miracle.

The present entrance is little more than an oblong aperture big enough to admit only one person at a time, and that, by bending the body. There seems to have been quite a good reason for altering the size of the doorway—in order to prevent infidels from riding their horses into the venerable building during the Middle Ages.

The central basilica, with its beautiful Corinthian columns of red and white marble arranged in two rows, is the old and original portion of the building, which, however, is now surrounded by a pile of more modern structures. Beautiful mosaics, now partly destroyed, adorn the walls and floor of the church, and the sign of the Cross has been sculptured into some of the pillars, probably by the Crusaders. Some might be surprised to learn that the fine oak beams which at present support the roof are real British oak, presented by Edward IV of England in the year 1428.

But it is not so much the church, but what is underneath it, which most fascinates the visitor. Passing forward to the high altar of the Greeks, and the nearby Latin altar towards the east of the building, we are struck by the contrast between the stately simplicity of the basilica itself and the accumulated mass of decorations, some of them very tawdry, displayed upon these altars. A curved flight of steps, descending from the floor at the base of the altar brings us to the famous grotto of the Nativity.

Not much of the original wall of the grotto is now visible, the rocky sides being, for the most part, covered with marble, and, in some places, by an asbestos covering to prevent the spread of fire. The grotto itself resembles a picture of fairy-land, being illuminated by a large number of beautiful lamps, suspended by what looks like gold chains. Each lamp is filled with pure olive oil, in which a lighted wick is floating, and the lamps are kept burning day and night. Gold and silver plaques sparkle everywhere in the lamplight, and paintings, some of them dark with age, hang here and there.

The public have free admittance to the grotto itself, and the whole building is shared by rival Greek and Latin priests. But woe betide the officiating priest who intrudes upon any portion not meant for the use of his community; or who should happen to transgress the time agreed upon for the use of those common portions of the church. Then trouble will begin in earnest.

Not far from this grotto, and down another dark flight of steps, is the cell of the celebrated Jerome, who, for forty long years, spent his solitary hours in translating the Bible into Latin, and in the preparation of other manuscripts. Faithfully he tried to serve, in this way, his Master Who once lay, as a new-born infant, in a manger perhaps only a few yards from where he toiled.

III

We shall now return to the grotto for a closer scrutiny of the so-called actual Shrine of the Nativity, which forms a part of the grotto. It is quite small and semi-circular in shape, being illuminated by seven lamps, and floored with marble. Let into this marble is the famous fourteen-pointed Star of Bethlehem, the custody of which once caused a dispute which helped to bring about the Crimean War of 1854.

Silver, in Scripture, is typical of redemption, and the star is supposed to take us back to the night of the Nativity. The star itself has a hollow centre, through which the original rock is visible. It is the rock, rather than the star, which is so much venerated. At intervals throughout the day, some man or woman will slip quietly down the steps of the church into the grotto, bending reverently before the shrine and falling upon the knees. Then, with face bowed to the ground, will kiss the rock which is in the centre of the star.

It is very pathetic to witness the solemn demeanour of these local people, whose visits to the grotto form a regular part of their lives, and who seem to ascribe so much efficacy to genuflections, pilgrimages, and veneration for these so-called holy sites.

Regarding the authenticity of the site itself, there seems to be a good deal in its favour. The tradition that the Nativity took place on this site can be traced back to Justin Martyr, who was born in Nablous, the ancient Shechem, and martyred in Rome. He was a reputed friend of John the Apostle; so that even in the days of the Apostles, the Lord was said to have been born in this grotto. Whether the Lord was actually laid in a manger, which often forms part of an Eastern house, or whether the so-called

grotto was a cave used as part of a house cannot be determined. It suffices for most people that the Saviour of the world was born somewhere in this locality.

A fact which puzzles many people is that, in such a peaceful place as Bethlehem is, and in such a sanctuary, it should be deemed necessary to have a soldier, fully armed with rifle and bayonet, always on guard at the grotto. There seems to be something utterly incongruous between rifles and bayonets and the Prince of Peace. Surely the presence of such a soldier is an open confession to the world that the Prince of Peace is certainly not yet enthroned in the hearts of many of those who profess to worship Him. Fanacticism is as ugly and dangerous a word in Bethlehem as in any other part of the world. A friend of mine told me that he once saw a man stabbed to death on the very steps of the grotto, only a few feet away from the silver Star of Bethlehem.

I once asked one of the young men of Bethlehem who was discussing with me a spiritual problem whether he had peace with God and had the clear assurance of eternal life through Christ.

"Why, of course, I am a Christian; I was born one."

I reminded him that "man is born in sin and shapen in iniquity," and that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

"But I," he exclaimed with some feeling, "I was born in Bethlehem!"

I could have told him of the gaggle of geese I had once seen hatched and reared in an old disused dog kennel, but which grew up just ordinary geese, despite their unusual environment. However, I took another line of discussion.

IV

One warm summer evening, while visiting Bethlehem, a small party of us decided to visit the Shepherd's Fields, which are a mile or so from the town. Strolling down a narrow rocky path, we arrived at the fields just before nightfall. Soon, from behind the distant hills of Moab, the moon peeped out in the darkness, flooding Bethlehem, the surrounding fields, the stone hedges and the olive groves with its silver light.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings

of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord . . . And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2. 10-14).

We could almost hear the message of the angels. We knew that somewhere in the vicinity of those lights twinkling in the town of Bethlehem, the Saviour of the world had been born amongst men. Conversation died away, and we mused in silence. Someone in the party suggested a prayer of thanksgiving. There, in the open fields, we formed a little circle, and warm and fervid were the praises which ascended that night from the place where angels first announced the advent of God's greatest Gift to man.

Some miles to the left of Bethlehem, in the precipitous side of a weird and remote gorge is the reputed Cave of Adullam. Though its entrance is small it has very deep ramifications and could easily accommodate a multitude of people. A water supply is assured from a tiny perennial spring flowing into a recess cut in the face of the cliff, and completely invisible from an enemy above. Safety and a permanent water supply would be two of the greatest assets to a man like David, hunted as he was by enemies and surrounded by a band of followers also "wanted" by the authorities.

"David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave of Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men" (1 Sam. 22. 1, 2).

There is surely something typical about this anointed king-elect, outlawed by man, yet chosen by God. Those men who stood with him in the day of his rejection were later to reign with him in the day of his exaltation. There is solid comfort here for us who follow great David's Greater Son. Having been driven to his side, of necessity, through spiritual distress, spiritual debt, and discontent, we are permitted, for the time being, to suffer with Him in His Adullam of world rejection. But it were better to suffer with David in Adullam than to reign with Saul in Jerusalem. For those who suffered were yet to reign, while those who were exalted with Saul were destined to fall with him on the mountains of Gilboa. "If we suffer we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2. 12).

Owing to limestone formation, caves are very numerous in the hill country of Palestine. Some of these have been in continuous use for ages past, and are blackened with a deposit of smoke and grime.

Wayfarers, shepherds, and fugitives have found good use for these natural shelters.

The reputed Cave of Adullum lies east from Bethlehem, in the direction of Moab, and would, no doubt, have been well known to David when he was a shepherd boy.

To gain access to the cave, an arched doorway has been cut in the rocky hill face, and I had to jump from a slab of fallen rock to this entrance. After crawling some distance under a broad ledge I came out in the spacious cavern with its ramifications leading in all directions.

David was a delightful personality. He had the gift of leadership, and could inspire confidence in his followers. In his native city of Bethlehem there was a sparkling spring, which had passed into the hands of the Philistines. David longed for a drink of this water and said, "Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!"

This wish, casually expressed, was quite sufficient to cause three of his followers to hazard their lives. Breaking through the ranks of the Philistines they secured the water at great personal risk, and presented it to David. The self-denial on the part of these men drew out the self-denial of their gallant leader. Out upon the ground he poured the precious liquid, saying, "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" (2 Sam. 23. 15-17).

CHAPTER VIII

Solomon's Pools

I

A FEW miles beyond Bethlehem, as we continue on the road leading southward to Hebron, we come upon the famous Pools of Solomon. They are three in number, splendidly engineered and rise one above another in a small valley to the left of the road. The conduit from these pools formerly passed under Bethlehem by a tunnel, and from there it led to the Temple Area in Jerusalem. It is still visible at Bethlehem and other places, and was so accurately graded that the fall did not exceed two and a half feet per mile.

Commonly ascribed to Solomon, the plan and workmanship of this water supply is a worthy relic of his magnificent reign. When slightly renovated after the British occupation, these pools again provided the chief water supply for the city of Jerusalem, until quite recently. By the new system installed a few years ago, water is now brought up to Jerusalem from the River Yarkon, on the plain of Sharon, by a series of pumping stations. The source of the supply is distant from the city about forty miles, and the water has to be raised nearly three thousand feet above the plain.

The dimensions of the so-called Pools of Solomon are said to be as follows. The first is 502 feet long, 207 feet wide, and 50 feet deep; the second, 423 feet long, 250 feet wide and 39 feet deep; the third, 380 feet long, 236 feet wide, and 25 feet deep. Robinson gives the holding capacity of the three reservoirs as about 84,000,000 gallons.

We shall leave it to the water experts to say whether this was sufficient for the needs of a city like Jerusalem. Of course this was not necessarily the only source of supply. There is a spring of delicious water at Ain Karem, a few miles to the north-west of the city.

Not far from the pools, and higher up the valley, there is masonry covering a spring which some believe to be the "spring shut up", the sealed fountain mentioned in the Song of Solomon (4. 12). If this be so, it may well be that the garden enclosed, to which Solomon was wont to repair for refreshment and solitude, was somewhere near this place.

Some have expressed the opinion that the aqueducts from the Pools of Solomon were all the work of the Romans, and that the one now in existence was built, as Josephus says, by Pontius Pilate from the money brought into the Temple treasury known as "corban." Speaking of this, Wilson, who is one of the greatest authorities on Palestine says:

"However this may be, the pools are undoubtedly of very great antiquity, and the knowledge shown of the rise and fall of water when conveyed in pipes, does not look like merely Roman engineering.

"It is difficult to understand how the Rabbis of the Mishna should have stated that Solomon made gardens at Etham, and conveyed the water thence to Jerusalem, if there had been no such provision till the time of Pontius Pilate. It seems far more reasonable to suppose that during the many wars which desolated the land, the original aqueducts were broken and were repaired at different times; and this at once accounts for the great difference in the style of masonry at various parts . . . If not here, where could have been the aqueducts by which Solomon supplied the Temple with water?

"The roofing of portions of the work with half-developed arches, and the style of much of the aqueduct near Jerusalem, are far more antique than the Roman, and we prefer to believe, and to enjoy the belief, as we sit under the shade of the Castle el Burak, that the huge cisterns before us are, at least in the portion hewn out of the rock, the work of the great king; and that though repaired and restored by Herodian and Roman hands, from time to time, they are, in the main features, a veritable relic of the peaceful glories of the great Israelite kingdom."

Twenty miles south of Jerusalem we come to the town of Hebron which figured so prominently in the lives of the patriarchs. It has probably changed very little since the days when Abraham sojourned near here on the Plain of Mamre. The manners of the inhabitants, their salutations, their methods of cultivation, the preparation of skin bottles, and that peculiar bluish Phœnician glass, may well have descended from Old Testament times. People still draw water from or swim in the rectangular pool which appears extremely ancient in its construction. The town is isolated, conservative, and fanatical, and the inhabitants guard with jealous care the mysterious cave of Macpelah, wherein are supposed still to lie the bones of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with those of their wives. The most luscious grapes

in Palestine still grow in the valley of Eschol, adjoining the city.

Hebron is the highest point in Judea, and Caleb chose it as his special portion when, as a reward for his faith and honesty, he was allowed, in ripe old age, to enter the Promised Land.

I I

About a mile from Hebron is the delightful little plain of Mamre. Oaks are still found growing on this plain, and the fine old specimen known as Abraham's Oak is indeed a venerable relic of the past. Standing beneath this ancient tree one cannot help trying to visualize the patriarch sitting in the door of his tent to enjoy the refreshing breeze, and being approached by the three mysterious strangers who brought him news of the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the valley below. "And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes, and looked, and lo, three men stood by him" (Gen. 18. 1, 2).

In the strange interview which followed, Sarah is promised a son in her advanced old age, and then God proceeds to warn Abraham about the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, wherein was involved the safety of the backsliding Lot and his family. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?"

God, in His grace, never leaves his beloved children in the dark concerning any coming cataclysm directly affecting them. Before the Flood, He warned Noah. Before He destroyed the cities of the plain, He warned Abraham. Before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, He warned the disciples; and before the world Tribulation which is to usher in the Millennial reign, He has given the Jews ample warning. Surely "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him."

I I I

About thirty miles to the south of Hebron is Beersheba, the southernmost town of Palestine. The great plains which lie around this isolated place are, in the summer time, parched and bare. Beersheba needs more irrigation. Even now the place is not devoid of progress. Some of the wells in the town are very ancient. Water is drawn up from a great depth by large wooden wheels, turned by mules or donkeys. The bore of some of these wells is remarkably wide and deep, and as far down as one can see, some of them are faced with nicely-fitting stones. "And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We

have found water. And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day" (Gen. 26. 31, 32).

It would be interesting indeed to know which of the wells of this place is the actual "well of the oath," dug by Isaac as a means of evading the local squabbles over the water question. There seems to be no reason why one of these large wells, upon which the existence of Beersheba has always depended, should not be the very one dug by the persevering servants of the patriarch Isaac.

At Beersheba there is a well-kept military cemetery with rows of neat head-stones, bearing the names of Britain's dead. This, together with other large cemeteries at Jerusalem, Ramleh and elsewhere shows part of the price paid for the British occupation of Palestine in the First Great War.

The thing that strikes one in walking through these lines of silent dead, is that probably never before in the history of the world has there been buried, side by side, men who were born and reared in the four corners of the earth, yet all of them forming part of one far-flung empire. Another fact, almost as striking, is that they should have been found fighting and dying in the historic land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in this remote place in particular.

IV

Travelling homewards in the direction of Jerusalem we passed on the road a man carrying on his shoulders an immense crate of fowls. A few chains farther on we came upon a solitary fowl walking alone on the desert road. It would have been comparatively easy for our Moslem chauffeur to have hailed the tired burden-bearer to inform him about this escapee. But, according to his Moslem mentality, the chauffeur could herein see the Divine hand working in his favour. He pulled up his car without a word, then began an exciting chicken-hunt in and out and around the scrub bushes. The fowl duly captured, the chauffeur, hot and perspiring, flings it into the car with the laconic remark, "Allah has given me a fowl."

The commonest word in the vocabulary of the Arab is "In-shallah." Morning, noon, and night, you hear this word uttered. Its meaning is, "If God will." A brigand steals money from a wayfarer. God has willed him to appropriate five pounds. If the wayfarer resists and gets killed, then God has given the life of the wayfarer into his hand. It might have been *vice versa*. Still it would have been God's will. This is the philosophy which dominates his life,

CHAPTER IX

A Cave Dweller

I

ONE might imagine that about the most unlikely place in Palestine in which an ordinary human would care to take up his abode would be the deserted hill site of ancient Mizpah.

Mizpah lies on the great North Road which runs from Jerusalem to Damascus, at a point about ten miles north of Jerusalem. Originally a proud Hittite fortress, such as brought consternation to the twelve spies sent out to reconnoitre by Moses, it later became one of the chief cities of the tribe of Benjamin, and still later achieved distinction by becoming the temporary centre of government of the Jewish community after the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar. Here it was that the short-sighted Jewish patriots ruined their last chance of independence by treacherously murdering the unsuspecting Babylonish governor Gedeliah (2 Kings 25. 25).

There is not much to be seen at Mizpah to-day. A few rock excavations, a disused Jewish reservoir, and a part of the massive Hittite wall, some eighteen feet in thickness, are about all that one can see above ground. But these old sites are deceptive. One might never suspect that many treasures lie hidden under the earth over which the fellaheen drives his rude wooden plough. The humblest mound might yield precious relics such as would gladden the hearts of historians, antiquarians or curators of museums the world over.

It was once my good fortune to look upon ancient Mizpah stripped of its covering, and laid bare to the sunlight after being buried for over two millenniums. Here were streets, foundations, cisterns, granaries, ovens, potsherds, and a host of objects newly uncovered by the spades of American archæologists.

Each object of interest having been carefully cleaned, examined, numbered, and photographed, the soil was then replaced according to agreement with the native land-owners; the city, minus those objects selected for museums, or destroyed in the process of digging, had been put back to rest, and the fellaheen now drives his plough across the site as though nothing had happened.

Only the Hittite wall and a few other objects remain uncovered.

This old bastion set up by the Hittites must have presented a very formidable appearance to the twelve spies if they came this way from Kadesh-Barnea. In the face of such obstacles, ten of the twelve visualized themselves as "grasshoppers," and their enemies as "giants." This augured badly for the coming invasion of Palestine. Grasshopper warriors could only fight grasshopper battles; and while the faith of Joshua and Caleb could have triumphed over all difficulties, as was proved at a later day, this false report of the ten spies brought forty years of wearisome delay to the whole nation of Israel. The Christian believer must learn to walk by faith, not by sight.

A remarkable passage in Exodus 23. 28 reads: "I will send hornets before thee which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite and the Hittite, from before thee."

The Hittites of Palestine and the surrounding countries were very powerful and well organised; so God allowed the Pharaohs to overrun this Hittite empire whilst the Israelites were learning lessons in the desert.

So Tothmes III was one of the "hornets" sent in advance to prepare the way for Joshua.

Then, by another miracle, God placed upon the throne of Egypt a pacifist king and religious reformer, Akhenaten, husband of the beautiful Nafertiti, and father-in-law of the well-known Tutankhamen.

Thousands of tablets have been dug up at Tel-el-Amarna, site of Akhenaten's palace on the Nile.

Some of these record the vain but frantic appeals for help against the "Abiri" (Hebrew) invaders under Joshua, who were advancing on Ajalon, Lachish, Ascalon, etc.

II

Some years ago, a bright blue-eyed young German, sick to death of spilling Russian blood on the Eastern front during the first Great War, decided to make his way to the land of Palestine. He arrived in Jerusalem with a very definite objective.

Though we may not approve the principle, in these days of grace, of making vows binding ourselves before God, this young man had signed a vow with his own blood. For seven years, laying aside all thoughts of earthly gain and matrimony, he had pledged himself to attempt to carry the Gospel to certain forbidden lands, including Hejaz Arabia. As it would take some years to acquire

enough of the Arabic language to carry out this purpose, he cast his eyes round for a place in which to live and study.

One day he chanced to espy a small rocky cave in the hillside at Mizpah. For a few pounds, he agreed with the astonished country landowner to have the use of the cave for life, together with the right to eat grapes growing on vines amongst the rocks.

It was an interesting little cave, with probably an uncanny history. A small rectangular tomb on the inside, which served the young German very conveniently as a cupboard, was evidently of later Jewish excavation; but the cave itself must have been used as a place of worship or sacrifice by the ancient Hittites. There was a rocky eyelet in the ceiling for suspending the sacrifice, a shallow groove in the stone floor apparently for carrying off the blood, while in the rock surface outside the cave was a horizontal row of small niches for the holding of oil lamps—almost a sure sign of Hittite worship.

The cave having been nicely cleaned and whitewashed, and a strong improvised door fixed in the opening, our good friend dwelt solitary and secure in his little fortress at Mizpah. Here he studied Arabic, and prepared for his great plunge into the unknown. Many were the good cups of tea he prepared for visitors who cared to search him out in this remote spot. Never shall we forget the pleasant fellowship and happy Bible studies as we looked out upon the nearby sites of Gibeah, and Ramah, places so closely associated with those two opposite characters, Samuel and Saul. Truly it is a delightful privilege to study these Bible scenes, Scripture in hand.

Having made a journey out from Jerusalem one day, I found my friend absent from his cave, and the door closed. While awaiting his return I chanced to think of the delicious underground spring of water used for millenniums by the inhabitants of ancient Mizpah. To keep out wandering stock, an iron gate barred the entrance to the grotto; knowing the ledge on which the key of the gate was kept, I was about to reach for it, when a fierce hissing opposite my face caused me to start backwards. The retreating serpent seemed as surprised as I was. Being grateful for his timely hiss, and having no particular desire to share the grotto with such a companion, I was quite willing to forego the refreshing drink.

I was later informed by a Jewish professor that the nocturnal species of snake which stands his ground and hisses when approached is a dangerous reptile. This one hissed, but failed to stand his ground. Neither did I! I have, however, come upon a nocturnal

snake which hissed and stood his ground and got killed for his boldness.

Speaking about snakes reminds us that the Bible has many references to this objectionable creature. The serpent played an important role in bringing about the fall of man, and is looked upon by all as the embodiment of cunning and cruelty. In most countries, the inhabitants seem eager to terminate the life of a snake, though some species are quite harmless and do some good by keeping down certain pests.

Some years ago a man in Haifa lost his life through sleeping in a melon patch with his mouth open. A wandering serpent, seeking a retreat, became firmly wedged in the man's throat. Despite the efforts of the local doctors to dislodge the reptile, the poor man died before it could be removed.

III

Our German friend at the cave at Mizpah continued to make good progress with his studies in Arabic, the time being interspersed with a few little adventures. More than one bullet flattened itself harmlessly against his little fortress during the drawn-out Arab-Jewish troubles. On one occasion he even overheard a party of marauding Arabs discussing a proposal to cut short his hermit existence. Just how to dislodge a live German from such a place of vantage was a job which even these hardy fellows were not at all agreed upon, so he was left in peace.

At last there came a day for him to start out on his great venture. Dressed in the humble garb of an Arab Bedouin, he set out in the early hours of the morning from his cave, walking first to Jerusalem, and thence down the Jericho road. He carried only a small wallet, in which was an Arabic Bible and a few other small but necessary articles. He was so free from anxiety that he had previously warned all his friends that on no account were they to worry about him, even though he should never return. He considered himself entirely in God's hands, whether to preach the Gospel, or, if necessary, to lay down his life.

Straight for the forbidden land of Arabia he set his course. It was the winter season. Crossing Transjordan, he encountered a lonely range of hills in the country beyond, and when descending on the farther side came upon a solitary Bedouin carrying a rifle. This was not a pleasant omen.

Taken somewhat aback by seeing an apparently unarmed and friendly Frank in so remote a place, the stranger sat down with him

and conversed. Together they shared some provisions carried by the German. This, according to the etiquette of the Bedawin, should have formed a bond of peace and friendship between the two. But for some reason the man was not at ease, nor did he show any inclination to listen to the Gospel story. Suddenly he sprang up, and, pointing his gun straight at the German's face, demanded his wallet, containing all his personal effects, including his Bible.

Thinking perhaps it might be a crude kind of joke, our friend tried to laugh the matter off, though it was far from pleasant to be looking down the barrel of a gun at such close range. The man soon showed that he was in real earnest; and as his fingers toyed nervously with the trigger of the gun, he seemed to be trying to muster up sufficient courage to fire the fatal shot. At this juncture our friend thought it wise to hand over his wallet. He asked for the Bible to be returned; not only was the request refused, the robber now demanded his clothing as well. This was a new ordeal. He gave his jacket reluctantly, but the robber was adamant. He wanted all, not a part. Being winter time, and at such a high altitude, this meant almost certain death. It seemed as though Satan had sent his emissary to bar the Gospel to Arabia.

As the anger of the robber increased, and it seemed as if it would have meant little to him to kill the man he had just had the satisfaction of robbing, the last stitch was handed over. Then, bidding my friend be seated on a rock, his assailant climbed upward to the summit, covering him at intervals with his rifle, till he finally vanished from view. So it came to pass that the man who had himself been the unwilling slayer of others, had come within a hair's breadth, humanly speaking, of being himself slain by a miserable prowling Bedouin.

He had now to face another peril. Naked and foodless, he felt the icy darkness closing in like a death-shroud round his freezing body. Snow lay here and there upon the ground. Creeping to a tiny cave for shelter, he calmly and quietly committed himself to God, fully expecting to awake in His presence.

When day broke, however, he was still alive. It seemed to him a miracle. Creeping painfully from his hiding-place, he thawed his benumbed body in the morning sunlight. He was soon able to walk. Before travelling far down the mountain, he found a piece of old rag, which he improvised as a loin cloth, and went on.

A Bedouin woman, working in a field at the foot of the mountain, fled in terror at the sight of a disrobed white man. Following the direction of her flight, he came upon a Bedouin encampment,

the occupants of which treated him with kindness, giving him clothing, and expressing a lively indignation against the man who had first eaten with and afterwards robbed him. What use the robber may have made of the Arabic Bible is not known. Our friend, robbed of this main asset, had no alternative but to return to the cave at Mizpah.

A later attempt to penetrate to the Hejaz brought him a fresh crop of adventures. One day, hopelessly lost in the wilderness, his tongue rapidly swelling with thirst, there seemed little hope for his life. In his extremity he called with child-like faith upon God, Whose he was, and Whom he desired to serve. Then a strange thing happened. Although the time for rainfall was past, a thick cloud appeared and dropped its moisture. Some of this he managed to collect from amongst the rocks. Again his life had been spared.

A third attempt brought him actually within the confines of the forbidden territory, this time through travelling with an Arabic caravan journeying to the interior. Being discovered as a Christian, he was taken prisoner by the Moslems. For weeks and months they tried by drastic threats to induce him to repeat the Arabic creed: "*La itaha illa-llah, wa Muhammed-dar-rasulullah*" ("There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet").

This he positively refused to do, witnessing with boldness that Christ, as the Eternal Son of God, was the only Saviour of mankind. His delightful sunny mien and absolute frankness, coupled with a bold and resolute spirit greatly impressed the Arabs. On many occasions they listened, round the camp fire at night, to his Bible stories, and even to the sayings of Christ. One thing they would never allow was that Christ had died and had risen again as the great Sacrifice for sin. To the Moslem mind, the death of Christ is a mere myth, another having been put to death in his place.

The big Negro guard, who was responsible to the Moslem sheik for his custody used to taunt him frequently.

"When the time comes, I will snip off your head easily, with one blow from this," running his fingers along his keen scimitar.

"Not until Allah gives His permission," was my friend's reply.

So his captors let him live on. In Jerusalem, as the months passed by, we had all given him up for dead. Enquiries were in vain. He had disappeared into the unknown, leaving no trace of his whereabouts. The little cave at Mizpah remained closed. We could imagine his bones lying bleaching in the sun in some lonely part of Arabia.

One day, after all hope of ever seeing him again had vanished from our minds, he suddenly appeared in Jerusalem, thin, wan, but still smiling. An Englishman, who had been called into the interior to erect a wireless, had heard of a captive white man amongst the Arabs, and had obtained permission to bring him back with him when returning to Jerusalem.

I V

Our friend now considered that his attempts to reach Arabia were at an end. The years of his vow were ended. His message of the Gospel had been rejected. He did not regret his efforts; only, his witness, instead of being a "savour of life unto life" as he had hoped, was now, as he said, a testimony "of death unto death." The onus was now upon the heads of those whom he had tried to serve, and his hands were free from their blood. He now felt free to leave the land of Palestine.

Purchasing a little donkey, he packed a few belongings, closed his door at Mizpah for the last time, and rode quietly away—to Germany! The adventures which befell him on this extraordinary ride were many. Yet always he preserved the same cheerful faith, and always his life was spared. Eventually, after months of travel, both he and his donkey arrived safely in Germany, where, so far as we know, they are both living to this present day.

The little cave at Mizpah still remains closed, just as it was left years ago. But we never pass the site of Mizpah without thinking of the handsome young German with the face like an angel, who rode to Germany on a little donkey which he had bought in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER X

Temple Area, Wailing Wall

I

TO the Jews, no site on earth is more sacred than the thirty-six acres comprising the Temple Area in Jerusalem, now known amongst the Moslems as the Haram-es-Sherif. Almost rectangular in shape, the eastern side of the enclosure measures about 1500 feet, its western side 1600 feet, the north and south approximately 1000 feet and 900 feet.

The dominating feature of the area, which is not all of the same level, is the octagonal Moslem shrine known as the Dome of the Rock or the Mosque of Omar. Enclosed within the building itself is the bare, natural, rocky summit of Mount Moriah. The rock, which Moslems have had the good sense to keep free from ornamentation or alteration, is about sixty feet long and fifty-five feet wide, and is deservedly held in great veneration as being perhaps the most historic locality on earth.

Melchizedek, King of Salem, might well have used this place in presenting offerings to the Most High God. Later, it was on Moriah that Abraham offered in spirit his beloved son Isaac. Araunah used the place as a threshing floor, which was purchased by David as a site for the proposed Temple, later to be built by Solomon. Here stood that succession of magnificent Jewish temples. Here, too, in a coming Millennial period, will people of many nations say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord," and will enjoy the blessings of Messianic rule with Jerusalem as the centre of world government. What better place therefore could there be for the rebuilding of the Temple than this sacred area? Thus the Lord, Who was crucified on Calvary, will reign in the city where He was once slain for the sins of His people. The ties of love between King and subject will be unique and indissoluble.

However reticent the Jews may appear about gaining possession of this precious Temple Area, we may safely assume that it is the dream of millions of the nation to own once more this sacred place. But, according to the writings of the prophets, Palestine will never be recovered with money, but only by an act of sovereign





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A VIEW OF THE CITY FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES WITH THE TEMPLE AREA
IN THE FOREGROUND (Chaps 1 and x)

Photo C Raad, Jerusalem

grace on the part of Him Who once dispossessed Israel as a nation.

The engineers of Solomon must have undertaken a tremendous task in levelling this huge site for the Temple. They had to cut away the rock at the northern end, and build up the southern end by massive arched masonry. Access may be obtained for a small fee to the underground structures known as Solomon's Stables. The geographical features of Jerusalem made it impossible for Solomon to obtain so large an area without this process of excavation and building up.

Separating the Temple Area from the city, and spanned in Bible times by a massive viaduct, was a very deep depression known as the Tyropean Valley. This viaduct was demolished by Titus after the terrible siege in 70 A.D. The spring of the first arch of the viaduct, first noticed by Robinson, butts from the south-west corner of the Area platform. From the curve of the massive stone forming the spring, engineers carefully calculated the original size of the arch and also the site of the first pier. By burrowing beneath a mass of debris, both the ruined span and the first pier were later actually found.

For our knowledge of underground Jerusalem, we are greatly indebted to intrepid sappers, such as Sir Charles Warren, who, at great personal risk, drove tunnels into places such as the Tyropean Valley, and walked up ancient sewers and water systems of the Jews and Romans. They seemed almost as familiar with this underground world as most people are with the present surface of the city.

The Arabs could never quite understand why these English strangers should take such personal risks merely for the sake of discovery. Naturally they suspected some ulterior motive, such as seeking for hidden treasure, especially in the precincts of the Temple Area, and as a result the Moslem authorities were inclined to restrict their burrowings, and that often in the very places where the excavators were most anxious to work.

Sometimes, however, the diggers were able to outwit the authorities. Having obtained permission to sink a shaft within a certain distance of a restricted area, they found it quite easy, once they were well underground, to drive horizontal passages in order to have a peep at some of the forbidden objects, without giving outward offence. The Moslems never seemed to tumble to this strategy; and as the excavators had no evil designs in the matter, they managed to gain a good deal of extra knowledge whilst keeping apparently a good conscience.

One excavator, working on the site of Ophel, where the Jebusites defied all attacks of the Israelites for generations, was fortunate enough to locate the hidden passage whereby the Jebusites obtained water secretly from the Virgin's Fountain opposite Siloam. Later, the water was conducted through the solid rock from the Virgin's Fount, the only perennial spring in Jerusalem, to the Pool of Siloam through a passageway cut by King Hezekiah. In Chronicles there is a reference to the capture of the Jebusite by Joab: "And David said, Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain. So Joab, the son of Zeruiah, went first up, and was chief" (1 Chron. 11. 6).

By tunnelling underground it has been discovered that much of the ancient Jewish masonry throughout the city, though deeply buried beneath the rubble of ages, is still in excellent preservation.

These venturesome British sappers must have enjoyed many a thrill as they walked along eerie tunnels and rediscovered water and sewerage systems probably forgotten since the destruction of the city in A.D. 70.

The pool of Bethesda, quite near the northern boundary of the Temple area has now been uncovered. The water level is reached by descending a flight of steep steps cut in the rock. There are really two distinct oblong pools separated by a wall of natural rock. This would account for the five porches of John 5. 2, the fifth porch being probably along this dividing partition.

II

Let us return again to the Mosque of Omar. Visitors are admitted to the mosque upon payment of a fee, and are expected to remove their shoes. But as this seems *infra dig* to the average Englishman, huge overall slippers are provided for an extra fee. Thus the pride of the foreigner yields revenue to the Grand Mufti, so all is well. This removing of the shoes before entering any mosque seems reasonable when one remembers that no seats are provided for worshippers in the mosque, so that all have to sit, kneel and prostrate themselves upon the beautiful carpets that cover the whole floor space.

El-Aksa is another huge mosque at the extreme south of the area, built originally as a church by the Crusaders. To peep inside the door of this mosque and see the blaze of oriental carpets covering every inch of floor space, is something which remains fixed in the mind.

Visitors to the Mosque of Omar are invited to view a certain

grotto running underneath the Sacred Rock. The floor of this grotto has a hollow sound when trodden upon, and most people would dearly like to know just what lies beneath their feet.

The Moslems recite all kinds of weird and fantastic traditions about the place, but seem to have no definite information with which to satisfy the visitor. Were it not for the suspicions of the Moslem authorities, there would be a rush of archæologists to clear up many points about the substructure of this extremely interesting locality.

From the summit of the Rock to the roof of the grotto there is a round hole resembling a well. This, taken in conjunction with the "Well of the Spirits" upon which one stands, is believed by many to have allowed the blood and washings from the sacrificial rock above to flow to some place outside the Temple Area. Others, again, deny that there is a passage way leading out from the "Well of the Spirits."

There are, in the Temple Area, certain parts of the underground ramifications open to the public, upon payment of a small fee, as, for instance the so-called Solomon's Stables. In other places there are systems of underground reservoirs, some of which are still in use by the worshippers for purposes of personal ablutions, etc. Until the new water system was installed some years ago, water was sold from these reservoirs by water-carriers using skin bottles. One of the tanks which stored water from Solomon's Pools for the Temple use is so big that it is referred to as a sea.

In the days of the Jewish temples, the Temple Area must have been a place of great architectural beauty and glory. When Nebuchadnezzar, in accordance with the warnings of the Jewish prophets, walked quietly away with the plunder from Solomon's Temple, a smaller man than Nebuchadnezzar would have been overwhelmed with his stroke of good fortune. But these hundreds of millions meant little to a man like Nebuchadnezzar. Long years afterwards many of the golden vessels were found unused in the vast treasury of Babylon, and were later returned for the use of the new temple in Jerusalem.

III

Before taking farewell of this entrancing area, we must climb on to the eastern wall above the Gate Beautiful, now walled up, and take a peep into the awesome depths of the Brook Kedron below. Immediately opposite rises the Mount of Olives. Below us, and slightly to our left, is the garden site of Gethsemane, marked

by a gnarled old olive tree of great age. That little winding track, worn in the limestone rock by countless thousands of wayfaring feet, ascends from Gethsemane, till it disappears over the saddle on Olivet in the direction of Bethany.

In all probability it was up this track the feet of our Lord slowly climbed, when, weary with His day's toil in the city, He sought the love and solitude of the house at Bethany, where lived Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus.

Below us, and slightly to our right, upon the opposite side of Kedron are a number of rock-hewn tombs. The tomb of Zechariah is amongst the most noted of these, and the substantial Pillar of Absalom, fractured, so it is said, by the constant stoning of angry Jews, proves that it is a bad policy in life for a son to conspire against his own father.

All along the Kedron Valley, on the Olivet side, are thousands of grave slabs, all lying prostrate, and after the same manner are marked the burial places of Jews who came to the land of their fathers to die. The Moslem graves are on the Temple side of the valley, their privilege being to lie close beside the wall of the Haram Area.

At the south-east corner of the wall, the drop into the valley of the Kedron must have been very precipitous and deep before the pile of debris was thrown into the valley. Some suppose this to have been the Pinnacle of the Temple. Warren traced this original part of the wall down another 90 feet through the rubble, till it was found dovetailed into the rocky slope of Moriah. On some of the huge blocks of masonry at the very bottom of the wall he found the red paint marks used by the workmen of Solomon when the stones were being placed in position, before being buried from sight by a levelling of the earth at the foot of the wall.

One can easily imagine the original grandeur of this eastern wall, rising sheer from the sides of the deep Kedron Valley. There is no doubt that, viewed either from the Mount of Olives or from the city, arranged in a semi-circle around the Temple Area, Solomon managed, by his herculean engineering efforts, to prepare an ideal site for his glorious temple.

Along the base of the south wall of the Temple enclosure are two very interesting relics often missed by visitors to Jerusalem. One is called the Triple, and the other the Double Gate, both of which are now walled up. The Triple Gate gave access to the Temple Area from Ophel. The Double Gate has two very large pillars and a domed roof, and is supposed to be one of the Huldah

Gates, dating from the time of Herod. If so this gate would have been in use in the days of the Apostles. Further along the city wall we come to the Dung Gate in the lower part of the Tyropean Valley. Zion Gate stands on one of the higher parts of the city looking towards Hinnom and the Kedron depression. Because the Valley of Jehoshaphat sweeps round the northern part of the city towards the east, till it merges into the Valley of the Kedron, even the precipitous Kedron, with its multitudes of graves, it is sometimes referred to as "Jehoshaphat." The deep Valley of Hinnom, sometimes alluded to as Tophet, also travels eastward along the south of the city, till, after passing the Field of Aceldema, it also merges into the Kedron.

IV

No description of Jerusalem would be complete without some reference to the Jews' Wailing Wall, situated at the western flank of the Temple Area. Since it is actually a part of the face of this platform, the Jews are able to come here to pray without having to leave the precincts of the city walls, or trespass upon the Harem (forbidden) Area. The prayers and wailings of these people, who usually congregate here on Friday afternoons to weep, and kiss or clutch the massive bare stones, one of the very last relics of Solomon's masonry, is very pathetic indeed. Their bodies swaying backward and forward with emotion they recite certain Psalms and prayers for the "city that lies desolate," and plead for the coming of Messiah, Who will restore the glories that are now departed. In this they are spurred on from age to age by the promises of all the Jewish prophets, which they know must one day be fulfilled. But the saddest part of all is that, having rejected the claims of the One, Who, chosen as the Lamb of God to bear away their sins, they must now wait on amidst sorrow and persecution for the return of this same Messiah as the Lion of the Tribe of Juda.

V

Near the Wailing Wall I chanced to notice one day a tiny Jewish synagogue where books and vestments were kept, a little sanctuary for the Jews amidst a Moslem population. Entering, I found in charge a Rabbi who spoke excellent English. In the course of friendly conversation he assured me that God's voice at Sinai was final, and convincing to all around, accompanied as it was with darkness and thunder and shaking.

In reply I assured him that God had once more spoken in this

very city of Jerusalem at a much later day, when there was also darkness and shaking; and that the final cry on Calvary, "It is finished," went far beyond the words uttered on Sinai. To this he was not willing to assent.

I asked him if it were not true that the Jewish people had been terrified on that great day at Sinai by the holy and exacting nature of God's righteous demands, so much so, that they earnestly requested Moses not to allow God to speak with them directly lest they should die? God answered this request by speaking personally once more to Moses, and said: "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings, and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen" (Exod. 20. 24.)

"Why," I asked the Rabbi, "was it necessary for the Jews to continue with their blood sacrifices, even after the Law on Sinai had been given so clearly and concisely?"

He seemed unwilling to answer, probably never having read in that masterpiece of reasoning, the Epistle to the Hebrews, this passage: "For they could not endure that which was commanded . . . and so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. . . . And to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also Heaven" (Heb. 12. 20-26).

Then, I pointed out to him, as gently as I could, that on the very day that God had spoken in thunderous tones on the mountain of Sinai, He had, by the implication of the blood sacrifice, pointed to another day on Calvary. That the Lord had made it very clear to the Jews, as to all the world, that the only hope of salvation for the human race was not by works of self-righteousness, be they religious or pagan, but through the sacrificial work of a willing Victim; for the lesson dominating the whole book of Scripture is that "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9. 22).

I never saw the Rabbi again, but probably, having failed to grasp God's great plan of redemption by blood, he still wails on amongst the crowd who gather at the Wailing Wall close by the little synagogue.

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with Thy righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring:
The terrors of law, and of God,
With me can have nothing to do,
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

*The work which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet;
Things future, nor things that are now—
Not all things below nor above,
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever my soul from His love.*

*My name from the palms of His hands,
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace;
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given:
More happy, but not more secure,
The souls of the blessed in heaven.*

A. M. Toplady

CHAPTER XI

Holy Sepulchre and Holy Fire

I

PROBABLY no other building on earth has attracted such a sum total of visitors from far and near, as the big, gloomy building known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. For the countless thousands of Crusaders, who, in times past, marched and fought *en route* to the Holy Land this religious shrine represented the very heart of Christendom. Armies of pilgrims from Russia and other distant lands have denied themselves, sometimes for a lifetime, for this one privilege of beholding, with their own eyes, the grey stones, the holy sites, the mysterious underground caverns of this unwieldy pile.

Curiously enough, while inside it is decorated by a thousand and one embellishments in the way of pictures, plaques, images, lamps, coloured candles, screens, mats, relics, crosses, mosaics, grills, lead-lights, and objects of every conceivable shape and form, yet on the other hand, there seems not to have been put forward, at least in recent times, the slightest effort to brighten up the grey, weather-beaten stones, or to reduce to something like symmetry the graceless architecture of its bare exterior.

Volumes have been written about the building, and probably far too much prominence has been given to the description of much, which in itself, is unworthy of anything but sorrow and disappointment. It is with some diffidence one writes thus about an institution so venerated by millions of the human race; and, without absolute proof to hand, one should surely hesitate before making statements of a derogatory nature, which are apt to rebound, boomerang-like, upon the heads and reputations of those who make them.

However much there may be to grieve one about the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it should be distinctly realised that the intense sincerity and religious zeal of thousands who have crossed its threshold, and have fallen down in ecstasy before its reputed holy sites, can never be in question. Those who have witnessed pilgrims kneeling, with tearful eyes, and muttering at the so-called Holy Sepulchre, or at the altar on the supposed site of Golgotha;





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THE JEWS' WAILING WALL (Chap. x)

Photo: C. Raad, Jerusalem

or who have seen men and women falling down at the yellow anointing slab, as though they were in the actual presence of God; or kissing holy relics with extreme veneration, will never make light of such actions or harbour hard thoughts against these fellow-humans.

W. M. Thomson, one of the greatest authorities, who lived almost a lifetime in Palestine, and loved the land and wrote about it, says concerning this famous shrine of Christendom:

"I am free to confess that it is utterly impossible for me to regard the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and its incredible congregation of holy sites, with complacency; nor could you, if you had been a spectator of the scenes which I have witnessed there, not once, but often. I will not shock the sensibilities with details of the buffoonery, and the profane orgies round the Tomb on the day of the Holy Fire. I doubt whether there is anything more disgraceful to be witnessed in any heathen temple. Nor are the ceremonies of the Latin monks on the night of the crucifixion a whit less distressing or offensive . . . Furious and bloody riots have occurred several times since I have been in the country."

It must be understood that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is not under the control of one religious system only. Orthodox Greeks, Roman Catholics, Copts, and others claim a share of its space; but the Greeks, according to an ancient agreement, are supposed to have the first place in the custody of reputed holy places in the Holy Land and its surroundings. The relationship amongst these rival sects, however, is far from harmonious, as the constant bickering and sometimes bloodshed has clearly demonstrated. It is partly for this reason that the janitor, who occupies his permanent position on a dais just inside the door of the great building in Jerusalem, must be a Moslem.

II

The great institution we have been describing never sleeps. Day in and day out, by night as well as by day, whether the entrance be closed or open, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the scene of endless masses, processions, chantings, to which must be added the constant coming and going of visitors, and the tolling of bells at intervals. Special feast days play a prominent part in the city of Jerusalem and in the Holy Sepulchre. Three separate Christmas days are celebrated in Jerusalem, one by the Greeks, another by the Latins, and a third by the Gregorian Armenians.

One could write at length about the interior of the building;

of its various chapels, its gloomy caverns, in one of which Queen Helene, mother of Constantine, is supposed to have found the three crosses of the Crucifixion on Golgotha intact. Then there are the crypts, the cloisters, the famous Stone of Anointing, the supposed place where Mary stood to behold the Cross. In fact, scores of relics and "holy" sites have been packed, for the special convenience of credulous pilgrims within this lucrative show-place.

Amongst all these, the genuine tombs of Godfrey de Buillion and that of King Baldwin find a place, and Crusading knights, including that of a well-known Englishman, Philip d'Aubigny, mentioned in Magna Charta, are buried under the pavement in the courtyard outside.

The famous Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre is quite small in its dimensions, and is situated in that part of the building known as the Rotunda. It has two compartments, both entered in succession by a low entrance which causes visitors to stoop. The first, known as the Chapel of the Angels, is about ten or eleven feet square, and the second, or Chapel of the Sepulchre, is only about six feet square. Huge candlesticks, with giant candles, stand at the entrance, and the chapels themselves are lighted by many lamps shining above the altars, lights which are never, in common with many others in the building, allowed to go out. Plaques and pictures stained with age adorn the walls, so that it is not difficult to convince oneself that this tiny innermost cell is venerated, perhaps more than anything else in ritualistic Christendom. The great dome of the church, which stands out prominently in the city and is supposed to mark the exact centre of the world, is certainly very impressive, and constitutes a landmark in Jerusalem.

III

No description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre would be complete without some notice being taken of the ceremony of the "Holy Fire," which, to the really deep humiliation of Eastern Christianity, is still carried out to the present day. Though I have witnessed the ceremony from a terrace by the courtyard, I could never bring myself to enter the precincts of the building during this extraordinary celebration. We cannot therefore do better than quote the graphic description of the late Dean Stanley, who personally witnessed the ceremony:

"The Chapel of the Sepulchre rises from a dense mass of Pilgrims. . . . It seems to be a belief of the Arabic Greeks, that unless they

run round the Sepulchre a certain number of times, the fire will not come. Accordingly, the night before, and from this time forward, a succession of gambols takes place which an Englishman can only compare to a mixture of prisoners' base, football, and leap-frog, round and round the Holy Sepulchre . . . like a witch's Sabbath in 'Faust.' . . . In one small but compact band the Bishop of Petra (who on this occasion is the Bishop of 'the fire,' the representative of the Patriarch) is hurried to the Chapel of the Sepulchre, and the door is closed behind him. The whole church is now one seething mass of heads. One vacant spot alone is left—a narrow lane from the aperture to the wall of the church. By the aperture itself stands a priest to catch the fire; on each side of the lane hundreds of bare arms are stretched out like the branches of a leafless forest, like the branches of a forest quivering in some violent breeze."

The Dean next describes the arrival of the fire:

"At last the moment comes. A bright flame as of burning wood appears inside the hole—the light, as every educated Greek knows and acknowledges, kindled by the Bishop within, the light, as every pilgrim believes, of the descent of God Himself upon the Holy Tomb. Any distinct feature or incident is lost in the universal whirl of excitement which envelops the church, as slowly, gradually, the fire spreads from hand to hand, from taper to taper, through the vast multitude, till at last the whole edifice from gallery to gallery and through the area below is one wide blaze of thousands of burning candles. It is now that, according to some accounts, the bishop or patriarch is carried out of the chapel in triumph on the shoulders of the people, in a fainting state, to give the impression that he is overcome by the glory of the Almighty, from whose immediate presence he is supposed to come . . ."

Dean Stanley concludes his colourful description with these significant words:

"Such is the Greek Easter, the greatest moral argument against the identity of the spot which it professes to honour—stripped indeed of some of its most revolting features, yet still, considering the place, the time, and the intention of the professed miracle, probably the most offensive imposture to be found in the world."

CHAPTER XII

The Great North Road

I

LEAVING the north wall of Jerusalem by the Damascus Gate, we pass, in succession, on our right, Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb, St. George's Protestant Cathedral, and then, a few chains farther on, the so-called Tombs of the Kings. The aperture leading to these skilfully engineered rock tombs is guarded by a cumbrous rolling-stone, the only one, we believe, to be seen, *in situ*, in the land of Palestine. In shape it resembles a mammoth grindstone, and runs in a groove cut in the rock, enabling the entrance to be opened or closed at will. It would require several men, at least, to move this stone.

About half a mile beyond the Damascus Gate, the road dips and crosses the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is here very shallow. This valley, which contains many rocky tombs, deepens as it descends with a sweep round the north of the city, finally merging into the deeper Kedron depression traversing the Eastern Wall. Crossing Jehoshaphat, the road now ascends the slope of Mount Scopus, which is really a continuation of Olivet. From this point of vantage we have one of the most impressive views of Jerusalem, spreading itself like a panorama. The Jewish University, and the beautifully-kept British War Cemetery are on the slopes of Scopus, and it was here that the wily Titus displayed his massed Roman Legions in the memorable siege of 70 A.D., in order to impress and dishearten the starving Jews defending the city.

Once over Scopus, a few minutes' travel brings us to the Bible site of Nob, where David innocently brought destruction on the priests of the Lord by accepting kindness from them when fleeing from the hand of Saul (1 Sam. 21).

The big isolated hill on the right after passing Nob marks the site of ancient Gibeah, chief city of Benjamin and the home of Saul. Gibeah was one of the three cities which tricked Joshua into making an unfortunate treaty when, according to Divine command, it should have been utterly destroyed, with its inhabitants. Hence, it is worthy of note that Gibeah was afterwards the scene of the most shocking and degraded crime ever recorded in Israel; a crime

which brought sorrow and death to scores of thousands of the Lord's chosen people. God's ways are not our ways.

To-day the site of Gibeah is bare and almost uninhabited. Away on our left, and some miles from Jerusalem, is a noted landmark of great military importance. It is called Neby Samuel, "neby" being the Arabic word for "prophet." The scene of very fierce fighting in the first Great War, it was taken and retaken several times by the British and Turko-German forces; and when the British finally succeeded in taking the position, the city of Jerusalem surrendered without firing a shot. A native Christian woman living at Ramallah, a village some ten miles north of the city told me how, day and night, while this terrible struggle lasted, the flash and roar of guns and the crackle of rifle fire went on incessantly till the battle was decided. This woman, having learned to speak English at the Friends' College at Ramallah, was the first to give information to British officers when they advanced to occupy her village.

Poor woman! She will have good reason to remember this great attack on Neby Samuel. One day, during the progress of the battle, when her little boy was standing on the steps of her house, a stray shell from the battlefield miles away fell in a garden across the road. Though apparently quite unharmed, the little fellow began to droop from that day like a tender plant. The concussion was too much for his young frame; so, instead of growing up to be the joy and support of his mother, they buried him in a little grave just outside the village. Such are the fruits of war.

II

Journeying still northwards, we pass Ramah on our right, and Mizpah by the roadside on our left, both places being associated with the life of Samuel the prophet. A few ruins of the ancient stronghold of Mizpah are still visible.

Ten miles from Jerusalem, the road passes through Bereh, which is the ancient Beeroth, and a few chains beyond this village there is a sign-post on the right of the road which gives us quite a thrill. It reads: "Bethel, two miles." This famous trysting-place of the patriarchs is on high country, not far from the brow of the great depression known as the Ghor, or Jordan Valley. It is mentioned first in connection with Abraham. "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west and Hai on the east; and there he built an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the

Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still towards the south" (Gen. 12. 10).

It was this tent and altar aspect which marked Abraham as pre-eminently a man of faith; for the tent signifies pilgrimage and separation from the world, the altar speaking of worship and communion with God. Yet even the "father of the faithful" had his times of doubt and uncertainty, for, "there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen. 10).

Here, of course, he was out of God's plan and pathway, and decided to return again to the land of Palestine, where God meant him to be. "And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had . . . and he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 13. 1-4).

Abraham was now restored to the life of faith and communion, but the results of his going to Egypt he could never undo. The woman Hagar he brought with him was the cause of that tragic division in Abraham's family between Ishmael and Isaac—a division still perpetuated in the Arab-Jewish quarrels. Only the advent of the Messiah will ever settle permanently this difficulty.

Bethel figures prominently in the life of Jacob. It was in this dread and hallowed place that the Lord God vowed His solemn vow to bring into existence the Jewish race as an instrument of everlasting blessing to mankind. We cannot do better than quote the words of this momentous covenant which affects not only Israel but all the nations of the earth.

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went towards Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all the places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into

this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el" (Gen. 28. 10-19).

Here, indeed, was God's Magna Charta for humanity, involving the promise of redemption through One of Israel's seed; for what ladder could ever span the fatal gap between earth and heaven other than the One Who was descended, according to the flesh, from this lonely fugitive who once pillowed his head upon a stone in Bethel. Truly, "Salvation is of the Jews."

III

We pass a good many more Bible sites before the road enters a narrow defile, known as the Valley of Robbers. The name speaks for itself. An ancient well at the foot of a cliff by the roadside is known as the Robbers' Well.

About twenty-three miles north of Jerusalem we come to the site of ancient Shiloh, which is a little to the right of the road, and at present quite uninhabited. It seems difficult to realise that in this present unfrequented place the Ark of the Lord rested for so long a period; and that here was pitched that beautiful Tabernacle, every whit of which was "to utter His glory." Indeed, there is no richer gold mine of truth either in the Old or the New Testament concerning the work and Person of Christ than the typical teaching of the Tabernacle. For many years Shiloh must have been the religious centre and rallying place of the Israelites (Josh. 18. 1-10).

We have now traversed the district of ancient Benjamin, and are passing through the country of Ephraim. The land is mountainous, and the road undulating and winding. But in these days, thanks to the smooth military asphalt roads of the British regime, we no longer have to bump over rough road metal, or negotiate dangerous elbows.

The road from Jerusalem to Galilee traverses the very backbone of the country. Careful observation of the landscape reveals that many of the ridges and mountain tops which now look bare and barren, show distinct signs of ancient terracing. When the

Israelites inhabited Palestine, the population was much greater than it is to-day, and no doubt, every bit of this high country, as well as the lowland plains, was fully utilized by the Twelve Tribes. Here and there, villages still nestle amongst the hills. Built of the same stone as the mountains to which they cling, the houses seem scarcely visible, especially in the glare of sunlight. The villagers cultivate the soil in the valleys, and also the small patches of land between the rocks. The ground is merely tickled with primitive wooden ploughs drawn by oxen, donkeys or even camels. In the spring-time the greenness of the landscape is in marked contrast to the dried-up appearance of the fallow ground following harvest.

Harvesting operations in Palestine are always a source of delight and interest to the visitor. On every village threshing-floor you may see the slowly-moving oxen going round and round, drawing a sledge-like apparatus with flints at the bottom to cut and pulverize the straw. Then, when the breeze is blowing, you will see the fellaheen winnowing their crops. With the aid of a wooden fork they toss the wheat and chaff into the air. The chaff or "tbin" forms itself into a little hill apart, and is valuable fodder for the animals in the dry summer months.

According to the law of Moses, it was unlawful to make an ox plough with an ass, for the simple reason that they were unsuited to work with each other. The Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, applying this principle spiritually to believers makes a very serious challenge in writing to Corinth. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (2 Cor. 6. 14).

I V

Some distance beyond Shiloh, a sudden descent in the road brings us from the high country to the bottom of a long valley up which we wind till we come to the important town of Shechem, which is in the district once owned by the half-tribe of Manasseh. This town, which is now called Nablous, was, in later history, one of the principal strongholds of the Samaritan people, of whom about 136 are surviving to this day. They form a distinct community in Nablous, a Samaritan island in a sea of Moslems. The city of Nablous is nicely situated between two mountain peaks, one of which is Gerizim, the mount of blessing, and the other Ebal, the

mount of cursing. We notice immediately the unusual sound of running water by the roadside, and greenness and foliage are in evidence on every hand.

Shechem was one of the six Cities of Refuge, the names of which, if taken in conjunction, give a beautiful summary of the character of our Lord Jesus Christ as being our Refuge and Strength. "Shechem" means, in Hebrew, "shoulder," the shoulder being typical of strength, reminding us that in a coming day "The government shall be upon His shoulder" (Isaiah 9. 6).

It is interesting to reflect that upon these two mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, the Israelite leader, Joshua, held the world's biggest open-air meeting ever recorded (Josh. 24). Here, according to the solemn charge given by Moses before his death, Joshua assembled the entire nation of the Children of Israel, six tribes on Gerizim and six tribes on Ebal, to recite the blessings and the curses of the Law (Deut. 27). It would be no ordinary matter to arrange the people in such a way that the whole multitude could distinctly hear and say "Amen" as each blessing and curse was enumerated. There were no loud speakers in those days, but Divine provision was apparently made on this occasion by two natural amphitheatres directly opposite each other, one on either mount, each capable of accommodating hundreds of thousands, apart from the space between and the mountain tops around.

It has been well said that Palestine is its own commentary on the Bible. If more students had the happy privilege of visiting these sites for themselves, and thus verifying the amazing accuracy of the sacred narrative, there would indeed be fewer feeble and hopeless critics of the Bible in the world to-day.

V

Some years ago, when times were more peaceful in Palestine than they are at present, I decided, late one afternoon, to make a hurried climb of Gerizim mountain. A remark made by the woman at Sychar, standing by Jacob's Well at the foot of the mount, about twenty centuries ago, interested me. "Our fathers worship in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." So I wished to see for myself whether there were any relics of that Samaritan Temple still visible.

It may not have been the wisest thing to attempt the climb when the sun was so low in the west, and I remember the look of surprise on the face of a shepherd boy driving his sheep down the mountain, when he met a stranger climbing at such a late hour.

The ascent was harder than I had anticipated, but it was well worth while. There certainly were traces of an old building, partly excavated, which, so far as one can ascertain, is a remnant of the old Samaritan Temple. What impressed me most, was the view from this historic mountain. To the right, on the plain beneath, one could look down upon the sites which are still referred to as the Upper and Lower Camping grounds of the Children of Israel. Directly at the foot of the mountain was Jacob's Well, still deep, and well supplied with delicious water from this Mount of Blessing.

An hour ago I had sat on its brim, and had regaled myself with its cool refreshing liquid. One could almost hear again the Lord's words: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Truly, the world's most sparkling water, which is but another name for earthly pleasure, will never quench the inner thirst of the soul. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life" (John 4. 14).

Christ offered to this woman the true elixir of eternal life, of which offer she was not slow to take advantage. Not only did she herself drink by simple faith, but she at once became a missionary to her fellow-villagers, her works thereby giving proof of her faith; and so the revival amongst the Samaritans was commenced at Jacob's Well.

This ancient well is about seventy-five feet in depth, the bore being encased a good part of the way down with hewn stone. For a small sum, the Greek priest who keeps the enclosure will lower a light on a windlass, till it floats on the water below. He will then draw you a vessel of excellent water to drink. The well's mouth is very ancient, the grooves in the hard stone cut by the friction of cords being inches deep. Many years ago a small Bible was dropped accidentally down the well, by a famous British theologian, where it remained for years. Later, when the well was being cleaned, the Bible was recovered, and looked in fair condition when I saw it in the British Museum.

About 500 yards from Jacob's Well is the reputed tomb of Joseph. Though not so well authenticated as the well, the tomb, like the well, is revered alike by Christians, Moslems, and Jews.

It will be remembered that Jacob, with his keen eye for business, had bought from Hamor, the father of Shechem, a piece of ground at Sychar, near to Shechem. "And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came

from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money" (Gen. 33. 18-19). After improving the field by digging a well, he had given the land to his favourite son Joseph (John 4. 5). Joseph, as a resident of Egypt, could not have enjoyed, personally, the use of this most excellent piece of land. Yet the rights must have remained in his name; for when, hundreds of years later, they carried his bones out from Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the land of Palestine, they at last buried him, not in Machpelah, as some seem to imagine, but "in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph" (Josh. 24. 32).

VI

Many readers of the New Testament are puzzled as to the cause of the intense hatred which existed between the Jews and the Samaritans, seeing that both peoples claimed to be followers of Jehovah, and keepers of the law of Moses.

There were several reasons for this division. In the first place, the Samaritans were not of pure Israelitish origin, having an admixture of Assyrian blood. They had been sent back by the king of Assyria to re-people Israel, after the dispersal of the Ten Tribes. This mixed company had mortally offended Judah and Benjamin by daring to erect on Mount Gerizim a temple, in opposition, or at least in rivalry to the true House of God on Mount Moriah at Jerusalem. In this, of course, they were sadly at fault, seeing that there was but one, and only one, divinely-appointed high priest, whose dwelling-place was at Jerusalem. He was the one mediator on earth between God and man. Yet, even this priestly office was but a shadow of the supreme High Priest Who was yet to come, the Lord Jesus Christ, Priest for ever, "after the order of Melchizedek."

Now, as it would be an insult for sinful man to approach a holy God without a mediator, it followed logically that Jerusalem was the place, and the only place, where true worship and sacrifice could rightfully be carried on. Even the woman at the well seemed to have some doubts about the claims of Gerizim when she said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Christ's answer was final, and to the point: "Ye worship ye know not

what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews."

Worship is a vital and serious matter; for God's great purpose in saving mankind is that they might "worship Him in spirit and in truth," not only while on earth, but as "kings and priests," for ever and ever. "For the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

Thus it was absolutely necessary for all faithful Jews and Israelites, even those living as far apart as Dan and Beersheba, to assemble themselves at Jerusalem several times a year. With hostile nations hovering on their borders, this would seem equivalent to exposing their lands and houses to unnecessary and certain peril, to say nothing of a national loss of time in travelling to and fro on these long journeys. But God is no man's debtor, nor has He ordained that man should live by bread alone. As long as the people of Israel were absent from their homes in obedience to His commands, God Himself had promised them complete protection from invasion, a promise which was miraculously and faithfully carried out through all the centuries of Israel's sojourn in the land.

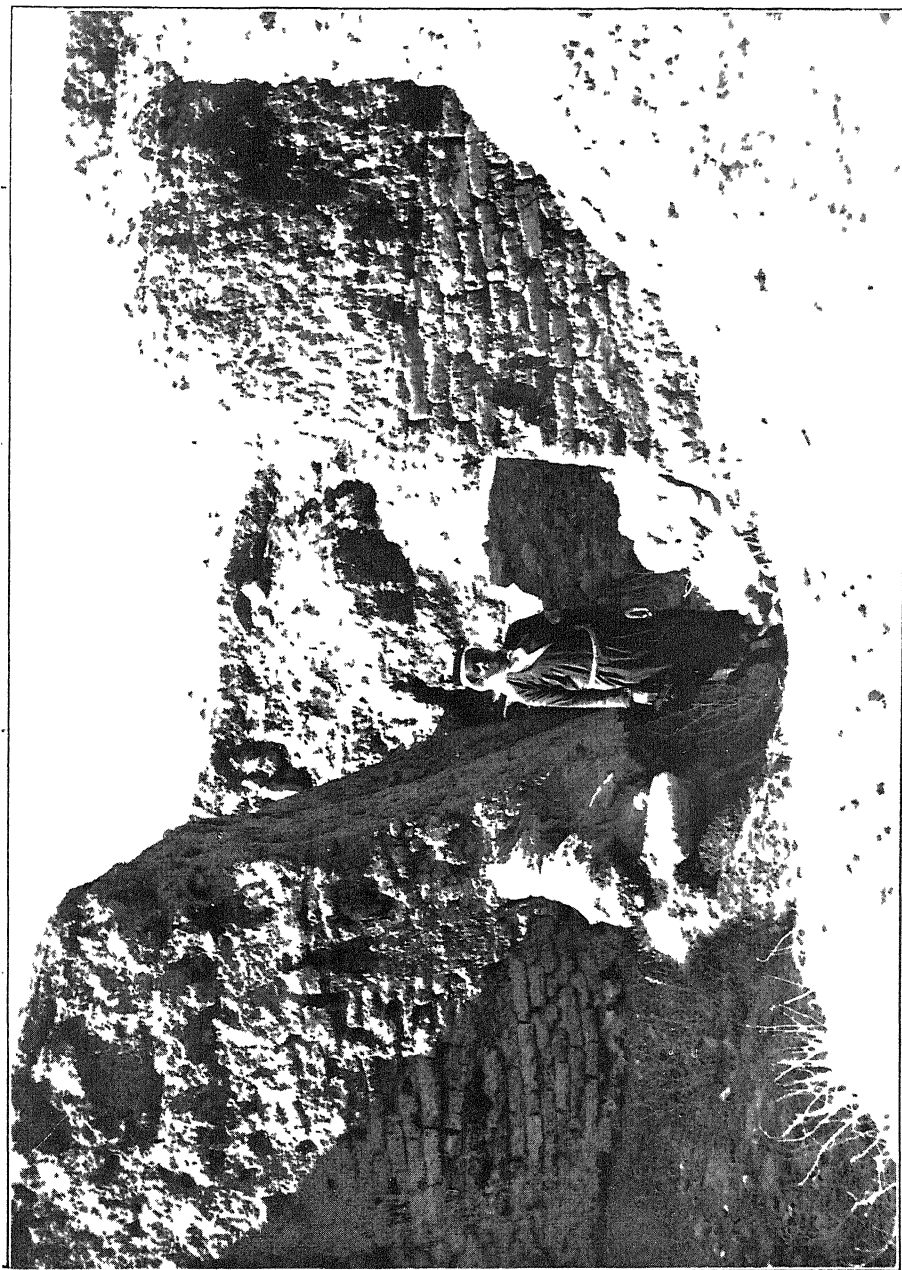
"Neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year" (Exod. 34. 24).

Israel was finally conquered by enemies, not because the people went up to Jerusalem, but because they refused to do so, and lapsed into idolatry.

In this present dispensation of grace, our High Priest is not on the earth, but at the right hand of God, where "He ever liveth to make intercession" for us. This is stated very clearly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, particularly in chapter 8. "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, Who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man."

Again it is written: "But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9. 11, 12).

Therefore the High Priest and ritual of the Old Testament were but shadows of the New Covenant—a "shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8. 5), a "shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10. 1). Moreover, "In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8. 13).



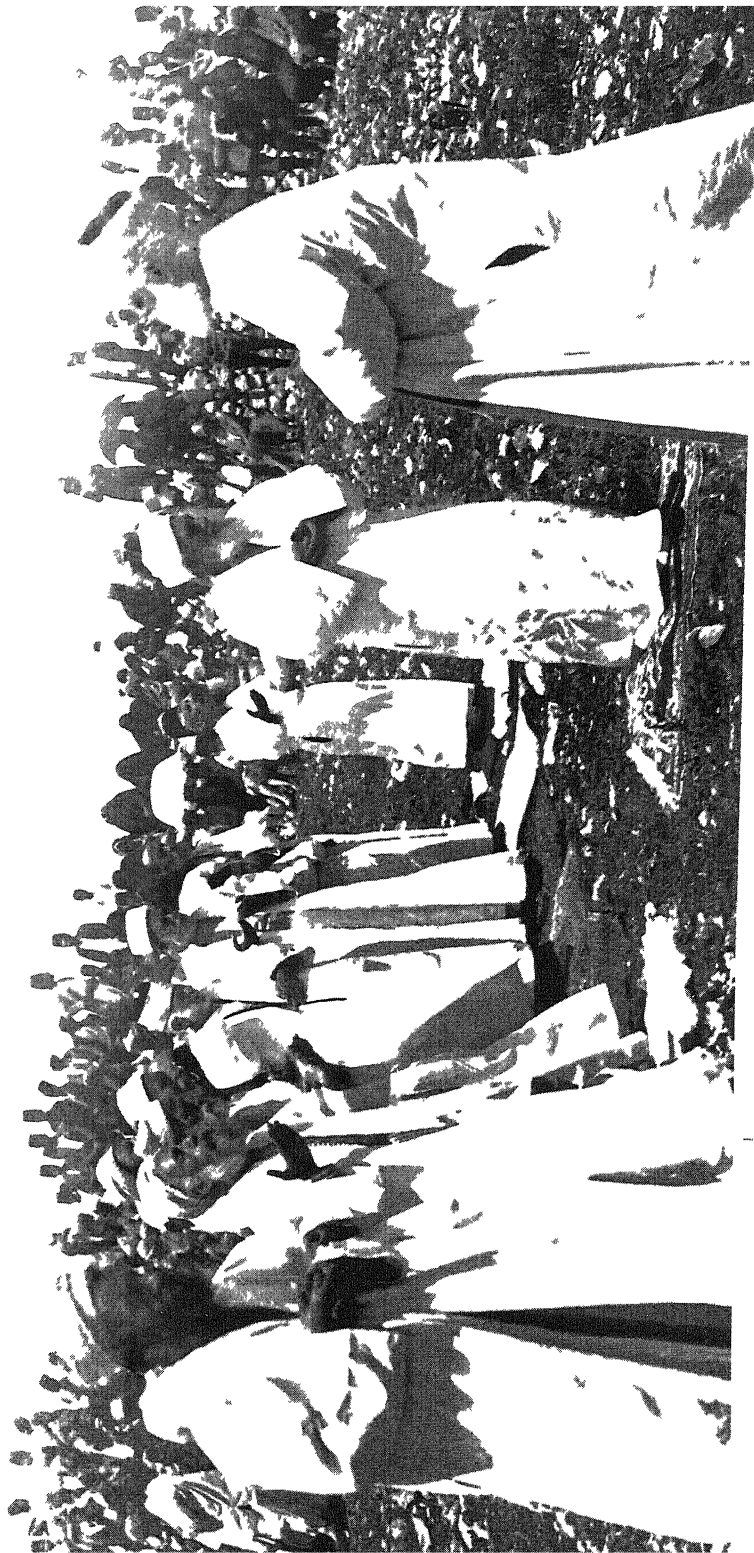
A PORTION OF THE WALL OF ANCIENT JERICHO
 (Notice the Large Mud Bricks Chap III)

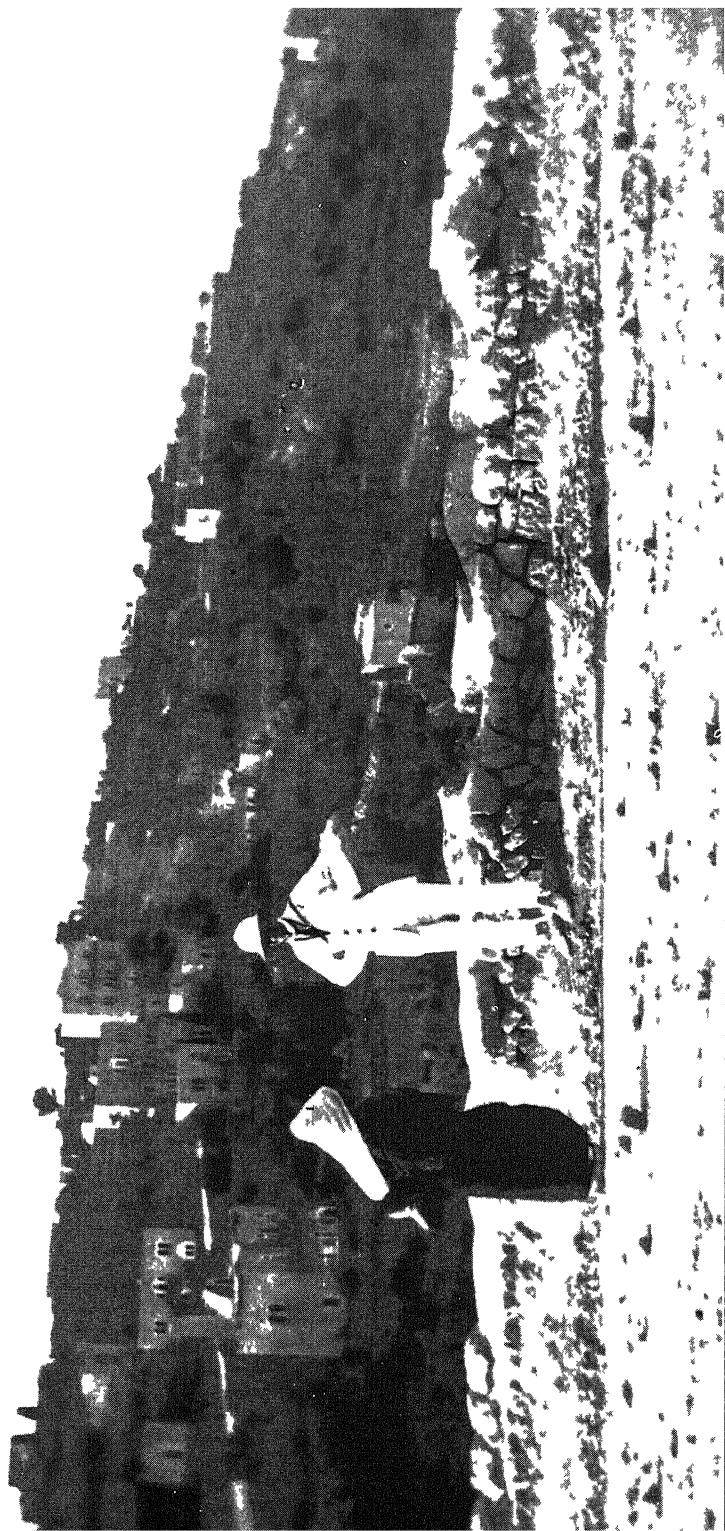


SUNRISE OVER THE SEA OF GALILEE

Talbot Fane, Talbot, American Book Co., New York, N.Y.

Th to C Kaal Jrus dan





A ROADSIDE CHAT WITH A WOMAN OF BETHLEHEM (Chap vii)

By whose authority, then, may we ask, has so large a part of Christendom seen fit to try and re-establish an earthly High Priesthood, buttressed with a ritual which has no sanction from God? If the Jewish High Priesthood at Jerusalem, was, as we know, a divine shadow or pattern of "better things," then surely a human high priesthood set up in Christendom without authority, would be only a vain attempt to copy a shadow; or, we may say, it would be only a shadow of a shadow, a sort of confusing adumbra, a mere parody of the Temple worship now passed, and obscuring the real glories of the Eternal High Priest now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

It is deeply interesting to the believer to know that in this present dispensation, our High Priest being both omniscient and omnipresent, there is no longer a need for believers to travel vast distances to a common centre such as Jerusalem.

For though, as a member of the great "royal priesthood" each believer still needs the mediation of a Great High Priest, it has been temporarily and mercifully ordained that "where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18. 20). The High Priest draws near to us.

Of course the day will come when all believers will be united, as a kingdom of priests, around the person of the High Priest, in the Jerusalem which is above; our praises being "unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." Then the type of the Jewish High Priest at Jerusalem will have found its everlasting fulfilment in the antitype of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

*No temple made with hands
His place of service is;
In heaven itself He stands,
A heavenly priesthood His,
In Him the shadows of the law
Are all fulfilled, and now withdraw.*

*And though awhile He be
Hid from the eyes of men,
His people look to see
Their great High Priest again:
In brightest glory He will come
And take His waiting people home*

Thos. Kelly

CHAPTER XIII

Passover on Mount Gerizim

I

WE arrive at Nablous, the ancient Shechem, a few hours before sunset, on the eve of the Passover; and, in company with other visitors we begin to climb Mount Gerizim by a rough track leading from the back of the town. Reaching the summit after a strenuous climb, we find a mixed crowd already assembled at the ceremonial site—Samaritans, Moslems, Jews, some Palestine gendarmes, a few outside visitors and a number of Government officials. The plateau, where the Passover is to be celebrated, is about 3000 ft. above sea level.

To-night there will be observed on this mountain, saturated as it is with Bible history, a feast absolutely unique both for its antique origin and its deep Scriptural interest. So long as the Temple Area in Jerusalem remains in Moslem hands, the Jews throughout the world are without a lawful place for the offering of sacrifice. Hence this annual celebration of the Passover by a remnant of the ancient Samaritan people excites a good deal of interest amongst the Jewish community.

As the sun begins to settle in the west, everything is in readiness for the coming ceremony. In a newly-dug trench we see a number of big cauldrons bubbling over a brushwood fire like so many geysers. Near at hand, and dug also in the ground is an improvised well-shaped oven, about nine feet deep. It is being heated to redness by blazing thorn-bushes and pieces of wood. Not far away are the rows of Samaritan tents pitched for this occasion.

The actual proceedings of the Passover begin when twelve venerable elders, dressed in white robes and with white turbans emerge from the tents and pass solemnly through the crowd to the centre of the gathering. With upturned palms and faces, they kneel upon mats facing the site upon which once stood the ancient Samaritan Temple.

The most conspicuous member of the group is the patriarchal figure of the high priest. He kneels at the head of the group, and again and again his eyes glance towards the setting sun as he

continues to chant from the 12th chapter of the Book of Exodus:

"And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever."

As the crucial moment of sunset draws near, all eyes seem riveted upon this venerable old man. The handsome face, with its distinct Semitic cast, the snowy-beard and flowing white robes present a striking picture. It is hard to convince the mind that one is not looking at some make-believe piece of acting, instead of a genuine and historic relic of Bible days. As a matter of fact, it is a bit of the world's most ancient regime projected into this twentieth century; and the setting of the scene is as genuine as the performance itself.

Quite unconscious of the vital role they must presently assume in the programme, a small flock of lambs move about in complete liberty, nibbling here and there at the scanty herbage—the last bite—for the knife and the fire are close upon them. The embodiment of gentle innocence, they are, none the less, the victims chosen for the Passover, and they seem to captivate our thought and attention. "In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house."

Suddenly there is a movement amongst the crowd, followed by a tenseness as though something great is about to happen. Some youths, dressed in white linen, probably the first-born of the Samaritan families, advance from the congregation, and each seizes a lamb from the flock. The first-born and the victim are now clearly identified.

Just as the sun dips down in splendour beneath the distant waters of the Mediterranean, the high priest utters a final blessing; and as the last word dies away, the fathers of the Samaritan households step forward, knives in hand. "And the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening" (Exod. 12. 6). Knives are unsheathed; there is a sudden glint of steel, and, the next moment, all the lambs are struggling in death. The application of boiling water makes the removal of the fleeces a simple matter, after which each carcase is dressed with ceremonial nicety. The offal and inedible parts are removed for burning, care being taken that no bone of the victim is broken. After being salted, the carcasses are lowered into the heated oven, the mouth of which is covered and finally sealed with clay.

The sprinkling of the blood of the victims upon the door of

each tent ends the first part of the ceremony. The chanting ceases. The priests in white linen seem to fade away in the darkness like phantoms, as they silently withdraw to their tents to await the hour of midnight. The visitor now feels as though he has been deserted, and realises, for the first time, that he has really no part nor lot in this unique gathering. So he must just sit around the smouldering fires on the chilly mountain top, and try to while away the hours between now and the Passover Feast at midnight.

II

The memory of this waiting time spent on Gerizim lives still vividly in my mind. I see again the smouldering fires, the ghostly tents, the stars twinkling down upon the scene, just as others must have seen them throughout millenniums. But, from the brink of Jacob's Well, somewhere down there in the darkness, the words of the Samaritan woman seem wafted upward to my ears: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain," and the Lord's reply, "They that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4. 24).

Somehow I felt that both "Spirit" and "Truth" were the two absent guests from the Passover on Gerizim that night. One could not but think of that lonely garden in the city of Jerusalem on the night of the world's great and final Passover, when under a tree in Gethsemane, the Lamb of God once wrestled all alone, sweating, as it were, "great drops of blood falling down to the ground." There was but one genuine link between Golgotha and what we had witnessed this night on Gerizim—the shedding of blood and the death of the innocent victim. Even so, the contrast was one of infinitude. With the one there was blank ignorance and a consequent indifference to approaching death; with Him, the foreknowledge and the anguish of His self-appointed sacrifice, yet withal the love that prompted Him to drain the bitter cup—for me.

"For this cause came I into the world."

In the face of Golgotha, Gerizim was obsolete—

"For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5. 7), and "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."

So this Samaritan sacrifice was nineteen centuries too late, and the sacrificial blood had been shed once more in vain; yet not, perhaps, entirely in vain, seeing that the vast difference between the shadow of the Passover and the tremendous reality of the Crucifixion had been brought home to the mind in so vivid a manner.

I spent a part of the remaining chilly hours inside the tent of the high priest's son and heir. He had kindly invited me inside for a friendly chat. We talked of many things—the history of the Samaritans, the rival claims of Mount Moriah and Mount Gerizim, an age-long argument which still drags on. We spoke also of their financial and matrimonial difficulties, which, owing to the fewness of their numbers, were quite acute. It seemed as though some of the men of this small community were not against the idea of marrying Jewesses "in order," as one of them expressed it, "to introduce a little new blood into their community." Another of the company present remarked, "My fiancée is only a donkey, and can neither read nor write. I want someone who knows about things." This interjector appeared to have travelled as far as the United States and back, a privilege evidently denied to his fiancée!

The subject then drifted round to the Passover and its meaning. Careful questioning failed to elicit any intelligent apprehension in the minds of these people as to the real reason for the shedding of blood, the death of the lamb in place of the first-born, and the approach to God with empty hands during this ceremony of the Passover, as well as the sprinkling of the blood upon the doors of the tents. To them it was but a venerable and historic formality, a joyful feast, and a memorial of past deliverance on that fateful night in Egypt. The vast plan and purpose of God's redemptive work, as revealed in the person of Christ, the true Passover Lamb, did not seem to have ever crossed their minds.

As with the Jews, so with the Samaritans, and as, we must sorrowfully admit, with millions in Christendom, the shadows of ritual and formality had completely obsessed the mind, to the entire exclusion of substance and reality. Truly, "the natural man understandeth not the things of God." These are only spiritually discerned.

III

At midnight the scene on Gerizim becomes once more all animation. Little children, fully dressed, are shaken out of their sleep by their elders. They yawn, stretch themselves, and stand up in readiness for the feast. The priests now unseal the oven, and the carcases are taken out all crisp and sizzling. The smell of roast meat pervades the chilly air, making the mouth water. There is no morsel for us; only we have food for thought.

The glowing oven, just opened, instead of consuming, has now

returned its contents in the form of nourishment and savoury refreshment. Here we have still another type of the One Who emerged from the fierce oven of Golgotha, unconsumed and in resurrection power, as the Heavenly Manna, the Bread of Life, upon whom we feed by simple faith and communion.

It was indeed an interesting sight to watch these Samaritans, especially the little children with muffled faces, standing to eat the meat of the Passover. Even the tiny tots knew how to tear the smoking flesh apart with their little fingers, while we looked on, almost with envy. There was ample meat for all except the stranger. At the end of the meal, the bones were all carefully collected and burned. All seemed happy and satisfied at the consummation of another feast on Gerizim, and soon began to settle down comfortably for the remainder of the night. When, at last, the day dawned upon the scene, not one vestige of the sacrifice remained.

I V

On the whole, I found the Samaritans a friendly and interesting people. It seems almost a miracle that there should still be surviving, in the midst of Islam, such a small remnant of a distinct race and religion. The very features of these people are a sufficient proof of their strange origin. For ages they have clung tenaciously to their beloved mountain, just as the Jews regard, with sacred veneration, the Temple Area in Jerusalem. Though the Samaritans claim to be Israelites, they are really of mixed Assyrian and Hebrew stock.

It seems remarkable that the dispute mentioned by the woman at the well in John 4, as to the relative claims of Jerusalem and Gerizim as being the place of Abraham's sacrifice and the true site for the Temple, still drags on. Indeed, the more one travels in Bible lands, the more one sees the extraordinary conservatism of these Eastern people.

Their salutations, methods of conducting business, household manners, house-planning and farming operations, all seem to agree exactly with the Bible narrative.

The eldest son of the Samaritan high priest actually handed me a booklet setting out the claims of Gerizim as against those of Mount Moriah.

There are two very ancient parchment rolls of the Pentateuch in the possession of the Samaritans at Nablous. One of these is claimed to be the oldest scroll of the Law in existence. They are

very proud of this possession, and will show it to visitors who go to see their little synagogue. Being poor, they will gladly accept even the smallest gift. Like the Jews, they are suffering to-day for the sin of their forefathers in rejecting the light of the Gospel. The spiritual revival, which began with the saving of the woman at Jacob's Well, and which seemed well on the way to spreading to the Samaritan community, might well have changed the history of these people. Just how this revival was checked, and by whom, will never be known till a coming day. Yet somehow, the Gospel light kindled by the Lord Himself at Sychar's Well was quenched; and so the Samaritans still stubbornly continue with the Passover on Gerizim.

*Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away its stain.*

*But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Took all our sins away,
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.*

*Our souls look back to see
The burden Thou didst bear
When made a curse upon the tree,
For all our guilt was there.*

*Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing redeeming love.*

Isaac Watts

CHAPTER XIV

Plain of Esdraelon

I

THE well-known Palestine authority, George Adam Smith, has likened the plain of Esdraelon to the figure of a giant, sprawling on his back, his head toward the sea at Haifa, his two legs extending toward the Jordan River, and his body occupying the main and central plain. If you climb the steep, zigzag road winding up from the plain till you gain the brow of the mountain on which Nazareth is situated, you will, if you look back to the south, enjoy one of the grandest panoramas of Palestine. You will see, with one sweeping glance almost the whole of this historic plain, stretching from Carmel, on the right, to Mount Tabor, on the extreme left.

If the plain of Belgium is sometimes described as the military cockpit of Europe, then Esdraelon may rightly be called the cockpit of the world. On this vast plain the most illustrious conquerors of all history, including Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Pharaohs of Egypt, on to Alexander, Antony, and a host of others, right down to Napoleon and Allenby, have either won or cast away the laurels of battle. On this arena, too, there is yet to be fought the world's decisive and culminating battle, before the ushering in of the new millennial order; for Esdraelon is but another name for Megiddo, whence comes the word Armageddon.

Over there on the left, and stretching away to the south, are the mountains of Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan fell by the hands of the Philistines. Flowing out from the foot of Gilboa is a copious fountain which brings prosperous fertility to the ultra-modern Jewish colony of Ain Haroud. Here Gideon and his faithful little band refreshed themselves before their amazing victory. Gideon, unlike Saul, being in line with the Divine will, the battle was won before it began. Surely we do well to ponder these lessons of the past.

In the shadow of Tabor, on our left, another great battle was lost and won, when the heathen Sisera, trusting vainly to his chariots of iron, had to struggle hopelessly against Barak and his modest Israelitish host. In that narrow defile away to the right of

the plain leading past the foot of Carmel Range, the swollen river Kishon swept to death the fleeing remnants of Sisera's defeated army, proving yet again that the battle is the Lord's.

On that highest point of Carmel, far away to our right, a monastery, which looks like a speck on the horizon, marks the reputed spot where the Prophet Elijah won his great spiritual contest against the priests of Baal. It is called by the Arabs El Mukhrakah, "the place of burning." That little mound immediately below the spot, on the bank of the brook Kishon, is said to mark the place where the priests were slain by order of the prophet.

Another oval mound at the far eastern corner of the plain marks the sight of ancient Megiddo. In Solomon's day, this was the Verdun of Galilee, guarding the pass between Esdraelon and the maritime plain of Sharon. To-day, American archaeologists are digging up all manner of interesting objects from this great mound. Amongst other things, they have uncovered a unique water system, operated from a concealed spring, and especially useful in time of siege.

King Solomon had a horse garrison at Megiddo, and, thanks to the spade of the archaeologist, we are permitted to look upon the remains of the horse mangers, and see where the king's battle steeds were tethered through holes in the stone pillars.

II

From our present point of vantage, it is interesting to note the distance which Elijah must have run before the chariot of Ahab, when, having prayed for the drought to break, there was the sound of abundance of rain. To have been caught in a rainstorm, with the ground around Kishon, owing to the natural slope of the plain, all waterlogged, would have landed Ahab and his party in difficulty. So, while the going was good, Elijah runs before the chariot of the king from the foot of Carmel right across to Jezreel, that squalid little village occupying a superb site towards the west of the plain. The distance would appear to be fully eight miles.

Surely this was a day of days for the doughty Elijah. The exertion in climbing up and down Carmel, the intense nervous strain in his long contest with the priests of Baal, finishing with a run of eight miles across the plain to Jezreel, would seem to indicate his being imbued with Divine power in performing such feats of endurance.

It has been pointed out by would-be critics of the sacred narrative, that, owing to prolonged drought, the top of Carmel would

have been about the very last place to find water for pouring on the sacrifice. Yet I have seen shepherds watering their flocks, at the driest season of the year, from a perennial spring near the summit of Carmel, almost at the place of sacrifice.

"And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. . . . Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. . . . And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

There is certainly no lack of interest in this narrative.

Two peaks on our left, towards the east of the plain of Esdraelon are worthy of notice. One is called Little Hermon, because it resembles somewhat the shape of the giant mountain by that name to the north of Galilee; the other is Mount Tabor.

Nestling on the northern slopes of the former of these two peaks are the villages of Nain and Endor. Endor is still a village of some size. It is isolated, and has a number of weird caves, where the witch of Saul's day might easily have carried on her mysterious and forbidden rites. When I once visited this out-of-the-way place, there lived there a jovial *mukhtah*, or head man, whose great pastime in life seemed to consist in spying out travellers on the plain below, waylaying them, and pressing them to come and eat with him. Indeed, his prowess of eating was so great that he was personally able, so it was rumoured, to dispose of a good-sized lamb at one meal.

Immediately at the back of this mountain, and so out of sight from where we are standing, is the village of Shunem, where Elisha once dwelt in his little borrowed room. Like many other great and godly men he had few material wants, and fewer still of earthly possessions. The Shunamite woman who granted him the use of the room on the wall, with its bed, seat, table and candlestick,

reaped a rich reward for her generosity by having her son raised from the dead through the grateful prophet.

III

Tabor, on account of its complete isolation, its rounded symmetry and steep ascent from the plain, is one of the striking landmarks of Esdraelon. Some believe it to be the Mount of Transfiguration. Unlike many of the peaks of Palestine, there is a good deal of vegetation growing upon the summit of Tabor. A friend of mine from Cana once told me that in his boyhood days a leopard was actually killed here by two men, but not before one of them had been fatally mauled by the wounded animal. I myself had an experience here. Whilst wandering alone upon the summit, and attempting to explore a large cave, a white steer bolted from the dark interior, almost jamming me against the rocky entrance.

Tabor is well worth climbing. The view, from whichever way one looks, is truly magnificent. Eastward, you look right down into that yawning depression, the Jordan Valley. Both in the valley, and also westward on the plain, little Jewish colonies are springing up here and there. They are beginning to change the face and character of old Palestine, and are spreading themselves in a manner which gives rise to grave apprehensions on the part of the conservative Arab community.

These modern Jewish colonies, with their scientific poultry farming, their pedigree stock and up-to-date agricultural methods, represent something totally un-Palestinian. The attempt to graft the newest order on to the most ancient one, especially by strangers from overseas, causes much irritation to the local people. To the average Arab, Jewish immigration is like the pouring of new wine into old bottles. The wine will be spilled, the bottle ruined, and the owner left with nothing.

This view, of course, is not borne out by facts. But who can eradicate an idea which has once fixed itself securely in the minds of the people? As a result of this difference in outlook, strengthened continually by local agitation and fed by foreign help and propaganda, it is a case of force being met with force, each side hoping that the other will eventually give way.

Two costly church buildings, as well as a monastery are unexpectedly to be found on the summit of Tabor. Though masses are repeated regularly, congregations don't seem to count in these lonely places. The monks seem easy-going and good-natured, and any traveller benighted on the mountain would have no diffi-

culty in finding a bed and a meal here. In Turkish times, and especially before the advent of the motor car, this must have been a great asset to travellers.

IV

If you follow the broad valley leading from Jezreel to the Jordan, you will see, about half-way down to the river, a tall, truncated eminence resembling a detached volcano. This is Beisan, the ancient Bethshan. Here the archæologists have brought many objects to light as they have cut through layer after layer of ancient civilisations. A gruesome reminder of one of the saddest and most humiliating events in the whole history of the Jewish kings was the discovery, some years ago, of a large heathen temple dedicated to the god Ashtaroth, probably the same building in which the armour of Saul was placed on the day following his death at Gilboa.

The lament of David over this sad event, besides being a classic of tender expression, shows also the love and magnanimity of David's own heart in speaking thus of one, who, in his life, had persecuted him almost beyond endurance.

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon: lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" (2 Sam. i. 19-27).

A man who could use such tender expression towards a bitter rival who, having fallen in battle, could no longer bar the sweet Psalmist's right to the throne of Israel, was surely a man "after God's own heart."

CHAPTER XV

Nazareth and Cana of Galilee

I

THE loud pealing of bells wakened me early on Sunday morning. The land was bathed in sunshine. I peeped from my bedroom window, high up on the brow of the hill, and there, spread out in the hollow below was the village of Nazareth, unknown except by name, but loved by millions of the human race.

On Monday morning, I found myself gazing into the wistful faces of a crowd of men and women assembled at the door of an hospital clinic—my first audience in the land of Palestine. Dr. B—— had asked me to speak a few words to these people concerning their souls, whilst they were waiting to be treated for the healing of their bodies. What could I say to them?

Nineteen centuries had elapsed since the Master Himself had addressed a congregation of people in this self-same town, for the good of their souls. It was His first recorded public address to the human family, and to His fellow-townsmen in particular; but His audience was not like the one I was looking upon this bright Monday morning. He had spoken in the public synagogue. The people would be dressed in their very best—well-groomed, religious, intelligent, alert. Those before me were, for the most part, nondescript, ragged, cast down, and poor.

Strange to say, the text chosen by the Lord from Isaiah 61. 1, 2, whilst admirably suited for a crowd such as confronted me, might have appeared, on the surface at least, out of place for an audience in a Jewish synagogue; and the Jews must have thought so too.

"And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him . . . And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the

gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4. 17-22).

He closed the book in the middle of a sentence, omitting the words, "and the day of vengeance of our God." For, as is frequently pointed out, between "the acceptable year of the Lord," which had then arrived, and the dreadful day of vengeance still to take place, a long period of time was yet to intervene.

But did the crowd in the Jewish synagogue appreciate this sublime announcement for which the sorrowing ages had been waiting so long? Was it as music in their ears that the long-promised Messiah had at last declared Himself, even in their very midst; that He had honoured them by His presence as a fellow-townsmen for nearly thirty years? Had He, on this momentous day, set before His audience a political platform, a pledge to free them from the hated Roman yoke, and a promise to set up once more the Kingdom of Israel, then all might have gone smoothly with the Divine Speaker. But the hated insinuation that they, Abraham's children, keepers of the Law, God's covenant people, were actually in need of moral and spiritual help, was more than they could endure. Was it possible that this carpenter's son, besides assuming Messianic power and authority, had also inferred that they, buttressed as they were with intelligence, morality, and religious knowledge, should be addressed as though they were spiritually blind, poor, broken-hearted, and captive to Satan's power? This was beyond their endurance.

Then came the crowning blow: "Verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country"; and immediately the storm of pent-up anger broke upon His head. Filled with fury, flushed with excitement, we see the gleam of the tiger's tooth and claw beneath their lamb-skin of religion.

Deeds, not words, was their reply. Quickly they hurried their fellow-townsmen to the brow of a local precipice; and gladly would they have feasted their eyes in fiendish delight upon the mangled remains of Him Who had graciously but fearlessly rebuked them for refusing His omnipotent aid; aid for the spirits, souls, and bodies of the whole race of fallen humanity. Again Judaism had pronounced its own judgment and doom. The Messiah Himself, at the very outset of His earthly ministry, had been vehemently rejected.

Has the human need or the human heart changed one iota since that day? We listen to the Laodicean challenge to Christendom, prophetic of the end of the age (Rev. 3. 17, 20).

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked . . . Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

Thus history repeats itself both in Jew and Gentile. In spite of "culture" and "human progress," have we not, all of us, been badly man-handled along life's pathway by the great usurper and arch-enemy of souls?

Christ's synagogue text was, after all, but a complete summary of the need of the human soul, with a gracious offer of salvation to every member of Adam's race. The offer rejected at Nazareth and by the human race as a whole is still open to any person who will hear His voice. It is an offer of rescue from the poverty of the natural man by the granting of heavenly riches and eternal life; an offer to heal our broken hearts by forgiveness and the balm of His love; so that our blinded eyes may be opened to see His worth, and the cords of sin in our lives snapped by His regenerating power, for He Himself has said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8. 36).

II

Amongst the audience which listened so attentively that Monday morning, I noticed one remarkably beautiful and intelligent face. It was that of a Moslem woman, probably of Turkish origin. Her veil was thrown back from her face as if she were reckless and disdainful of Moslem custom. Though comparatively young and well-dressed, she appeared to be longing for something she might never possess—happiness. The youngest wife of a decrepit old tyrant, I was later informed that she was definitely amongst the ranks of the literally and spiritually sick and broken-hearted. Here, indeed, was an artist's model, perhaps a thwarted Cleopatra, whose face and form might, in other circumstances, have been her fortune. Now the grey eyes and exquisite features reflected sorrow and defeat. I never saw her again, but sincerely trust that the humble message of the Gospel, spoken from the Messiah's synagogue text, brought a ray of heavenly hope in her world of darkness and despair.

There is nothing especially attractive about the actual appearance of Nazareth. Yet to stand at sunset on the heights overlooking the town, to see the women and children drawing water from the one perennial fountain of the town, just as their ancestors have done

before them from time immemorial, and to gaze on the natural landmarks of the place, every detail of which must have been familiar to Christ's eyes, is indeed an unspeakable privilege.

Nazareth is one of the genuine sites of Palestine. The town has probably altered but little in appearance since Bible days. To this spring of water, which is endearingly familiar in picture to the whole of Christendom, the Lord Himself must have resorted as a child, sometimes accompanied by His mother. He would see the women hoisting their earthen water-pots on each other's heads as they are doing this day.

To be strictly accurate, the spring, as known by the people of Christ's day, had its source some forty yards farther up the slope, issuing from a site now enclosed by the Church of the Annunciation. From this natural outlet in the rock, the water is at present conveyed by a covered conduit to the present reservoir, from which it is drawn by the townspeople. If you cared to see the actual crumbling steps of limestone, leading down to the original spring, you must go to the church and look through a window. For a trifle of backsheesh the priest will draw you up a drink of water in a tiny silver pail from the actual spring in the floor of the church.

As we drink from this famous fountain, the only one in Nazareth which never runs dry, we cannot but feel that it is a beautiful type of the Nazarene Himself Who could say: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"; and again, "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

III

It is about four miles from Nazareth to the village of Cana of Galilee. It would therefore be easy for our Lord and His disciples to walk this distance in order to attend a local wedding feast. The road is very hilly, and Cana lies in a broad valley, with fields and olive trees round about.

I once spent a very happy ten days in Cana with an intimate friend and his parents whose home was there. Neither of the parents could speak a word of English; the son had resided for some years in America and England before returning to his native village. It was, indeed, a revelation to live amongst these simple village folk, and we learned more, in this way, about the people and the land, than by the study of many books.

It is easy to allow oneself to be trapped into making hasty and





SYRIA
A BEDOUIN SHEIKH OF THE DESERT

Photo: Exclusive News Agency Ltd.

unfair statements about the people and the customs of another land than that of our own. How, for instance, could a traveller from New York or from the West End of London correctly size up the people of Palestine by paying a hasty visit to that country?

Suppose such an one were to visit a Bedouin encampment. True, he might be thrilled with the novelty of the surroundings or impressed with the rough kindness of a people who live in a different world from his. Yet, in writing of such a visit there might be a strong temptation to make use of such terms as "crude," "dirty," "ridiculous," etc. In other words, he would use the New York or West End measuring rod in sizing up the men of the desert. How could he do otherwise?

Equally, a Bedawy in London or New York, if one can imagine such, might be immensely tickled by the dazzling sights and sounds of a great city. But, back again in the free and open desert, how he might chuckle to himself at the folly of men and women, cooped up all day in offices, starting to wake up when it is time to go to bed, or climbing up thirty-six stories before starting work each morning. Surely, in many ways, the advantage might lie with the more natural and care-free desert wanderer. After all, the first city was founded by Cain, and city life has its doubtful luxuries.

During those days at Cana, I learned to be more sympathetic with these humble folk who live their lives as in Bible days. Beyond question there are some reforms that might do much to improve the lot of these people, especially in matters pertaining to sanitation and hygiene. Thanks to the British regime, and to the hard work of district nurses and doctors, both native and European, much knowledge has been disseminated regarding the care of the eyes and other matters. Apart from this, one would be somewhat loth to see too great a departure from the old and established ways of life. For instance, if two women can grind corn, locally grown, by hand, before baking their wholemeal bread, why deprive them of this age-long custom of sitting under a vine or fig tree on a lovely Palestine morning, where they can have a friendly chat together as they prepare food for the day?

If people know how to preserve their own raisins and olives, straight from their own trees, or kill a kid from their own flock, or get milk from their own goat when a visitor unexpectedly arrives what can be better than that? When a man can pack under his own roof at night, not only his wife and family, but also his goods, chattels, and sometimes even his live stock, having a solid oak beam behind his nail-studded door, why worry about night watch-

men, steel safes, or Yale locks? If, through a more leisurely and care-free life, the people of these countries need fewer mental hospitals to gather up frayed and distracted nerves, or operating tables to counteract errors in diet, why cannot we learn something from them, as they from us?

One cannot help noticing that the people of the land, naturally polite, are eager to assign, sometimes in a most refined way, honour and respect where it is due. For instance, a villager of Galilee, more prosperous than usual, had three of his sons home on holiday. Himself quite illiterate, one of his sons was a doctor, and another had studied law. The venerable old peasant was sitting in his guest room early one morning, when his three sons entered after rising for the day. Each son approached the father by turn, lifted his hand, kissed it, and pressed it to his forehead. They then remained standing. The old man looked at them with mingled love and pride, and said quietly, "Be seated, my sons."

In these so-called backward countries, it is a little humiliating to discover that deference and respect for age, together with the little refinements of life so often missing in this modern age, are still being practised. A very sharp warning is given us in this respect by the Apostle Paul. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3. 1-5). This, surely, is not a very flattering summary of the consummation of our boasted civilisation!

IV

It is a common saying, that "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin." A mother's love for her child always inspires sympathy in others. Glancing through an open door of a house in Cana, I notice a room full of women and children, all sitting about on mats or low stools. Some are talking in subdued tones, others are in silent tears. In the midst is a cradle, in which lies a little waxen figure. The angel of death had just passed by. Some of the neighbours have left their domestic duties to comfort the bereaved mother. Most of these could tell that they, too, had lost loved ones. Such comfort can soften, though it cannot remove, the sting of bereavement.

This infant mortality is all too common in these villages of Bible lands, and it is just here that the enlightenment from the West can play its part.

I notice that no men are present amongst the mourners, though a number of children mingle with the throng. Some are helping to keep the flies from alighting on the cradle. Alas! the deadly work of these insects has probably now been completed. Several toys, and a pair of tiny red slippers, now empty, heighten the pathos of the scene. Soon, or at least some time during this day, there will be a small funeral procession to the outskirts of the village. No Saviour will be in Cana this day to stay the cortege and raise the little one to life; though His invisible presence may be counted on to bring comfort to the mourners. The company will then disperse, and, for a day or two, kind friends, as often as they can be spared from domestic ties, will call to see the bereaved mother, or will walk with her to see again the tiny grave, there to weep aloud. The mother is brave, but deep down in her heart she knows she has lost a son who might have been a joy and comfort to her in after years.

In another house, I came upon a second group of women. This time the child was not dead, but was in a very bad way. It was a Moslem home, but being together, the women were all unveiled. The mission doctor from Nazareth happened to be passing through the village, and looked in upon the scene.

"You must bring that child straight to the hospital at Nazareth," he said.

The mother obeyed somewhat reluctantly, so at least it seemed. Silently she sat in the back seat of the car, the little fevered child closely enveloped in the folds of her black veil. She had, no doubt, very real misgivings about the hospital. What if the child should die in Christian hands? Then there were those horrid European beds to sleep in, for she, too, was to remain at the hospital. That night, a nurse found the woman sleeping on a mat underneath the bed allotted her. The baby progressed wonderfully, but the mother was far from happy in her strange environment. One day both the mother and her baby were missing. She had taken the law into her own hand. Two or three days later, whilst walking through the village, I noticed again a room full of women. This time it was a Moslem mourning, and again a little waxen figure was the cynosure of all eyes. At any rate, the child had not died in Christian hands!

The custom of wailing for the dead is still prevalent in Bible

lands. I have seen Moslem women screaming and throwing dust on their heads when suddenly bereaved. The Christians seem more subdued in their sorrow.

Cemeteries are a favourite resort for the women of the village, and graves are visited with frequent regularity.

Though the slender tear bottles found in ancient graves are no longer in evidence, there are still professional mourners who can shed copious tears for money.

v

During this visit to Cana, I cleared up a matter which had often puzzled me in reading through the story of Christ in the home of Simon the Pharisee. How could it have been possible for a poor sinful woman to enter the house of this proud Pharisee uninvited, and even to approach the feet of the Lord, his distinguished guest? It appears that the village people are often closely interrelated, and are therefore more or less free from that class distinction so noticeable in other places. Consequently, there is a freedom, between house and house, whether of the richer or poorer. In the absence of telephones or the daily newspaper, news is usually disseminated by word of mouth. One day, all may hasten to the house of a neighbour to hear some special piece of news; to-morrow another may hold the floor. Consequently, as soon as a visitor, especially if he be a person of some distinction, calls at a home, the whole village is soon full of speculation and curiosity. No sooner does he take his seat in the guest chamber, common to most houses, than people begin to approach from all directions to see and to hear. The hospitable laws of the East forbid that any should be turned away, especially as those who are entertainers to-day may be listeners to-morrow. There is a spirit of *camaraderie* pervading most villages.

No doubt Simon was deeply annoyed at the conduct of this woman, since her local reputation was far from what it might have been. But Simon had totally misjudged at least two of his guests on this occasion. Had he known the facts, as we do, he, too, might have fallen down, in deep love and humility, at the feet of the Saviour, thereby taking his proper place beside this penitent woman. The story, being as useful as it is sublime, we will quote it as it is written.

"And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,

when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself saying, This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he said, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for my feet; but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7. 36-50).

CHAPTER XVI

A Harvest Field in Cana

I

THE shepherds of Cana were astir almost before the stars had faded from the brilliant Palestinian sky. I was awakened from my slumber on the roof top by the pleasant tinkling of innumerable sheep bells, as the flocks moved away from the village spring in various directions, seeking pasture for the day.

Harvesting is about to commence in the fields of Cana on this day of days, and our patriarchal host, a superb specimen of manhood, dressed in flowing robes such as Abraham might have worn, is busy supervising his kinsmen in their preparation for this great event. Abu Sleiman (father of Solomon) is his name, for in the East men are usually called after the name of their eldest son.

Arrived at the harvest field, one might truly imagine himself back in the fields of Boaz. Every detail, so far as one can judge, is but a repetition of Bible incidents. The younger men, with narrow toothed sickles, are reaping the corn, cutting it by rhythm in handfuls as they sing together. Young women are binding the sheaves with dexterous fingers, while a number of boys pass and repass with asses laden with sheaves which are being carried to the village threshing-floor. Sometimes the head and body of the donkey seem completely hidden by the huge bundle of sheaves, in which case the animal is directed by the tail.

The threshing floor itself is a piece of rocky surface some three or four acres in extent. In this area, the entire crop of the villagers must, by a severely strict order of the Government, be stacked for assessment, before being threshed. Otherwise there might be little chance of collecting a fair revenue from some of the more wily inhabitants. One can therefore understand why Boaz would choose to sleep all night on such a common threshing floor—a very necessary custom, one would say, for safeguarding the family interests, especially when threshing had once begun.

The sun grows hotter on the harvest field, and the elder women, looking very quaint in their eastern garb, are now busy preparing

the midday meal for the hungry harvesters. Abu Sleiman, who, on account of his age, has been enjoying a privileged doze under the shade of some sheaves, is now alert again. A huge steaming dish placed on the ground is quickly surrounded by the men of our party, the women waiting on, or eating some little distance away. We all squat on the ground; and, in lieu of knife and fork, scoop up the food from the common dish with our pieces of unleavened bread. The meal finished, we sit round for a little rest wherever we can find shade. A little girl passes with a parcel of provisions from the village balanced deftly on her head. Her long flowing garments trail upon the ground, almost covering her tiny bare feet, and giving her a quaint grandmotherly appearance. We greet her, and very demurely she returns our salutation with, "May God preserve you."

Not far from where we are eating is a fine old fig tree, which seems to serve as a kind of village town hall. A few leisurely effendis, or better class villagers, whose sole occupation seems to be that of fingering strings of beads as they discuss passing events, are sitting beneath the dense shade. Maybe they have travelled to America and back, and are now living on their acquired capital! One old man, dreaming perhaps of other bumper harvest scenes in his boyhood days, is snoring peacefully, his head, like Jacob, upon a stone pillow. Was not Nathaniel sitting under a tree in this self-same village of Cana when the Lord passed by? Also, in a wonderful day yet to be ushered in, when He Who once turned the water from the spring of Cana into wine will again rule over this land, favoured with Millennial blessing; when, in all probability, the world's "big business," or at least the nerve-wracking tension of our artificial civilisation may have passed into oblivion, we read that "every man will sit under his vine and fig tree." The East will again set the example.

I ask one of these men under the fig tree what to him must have seemed a foolish question: "Were you born in Cana?"

"Why not?" he replied, "do I not live here?"

But here comes a shepherd with some sheep. They graze along the path to within a foot of the standing corn, but never seem to risk snatching even a sly mouthful. If they do, they will get a sharp rebuke from the shepherd in charge. No doubt they have been well trained in field etiquette from the time they were tiny lambs.

"Will these sheep come to you if you call them?" I innocently enquired.

"Why not?" he replies.

He makes a queer noise in his throat, and the nearest sheep leaves his grazing, walks straight across to the shepherd, and nestles its head in the man's flowing garments. He strokes its head and dismisses it.

II

As the day wore on, one was again and again reminded of Bible incidents and allusions. There seemed to be an atmosphere of great contentedness amongst these village people, and they seemed comparatively healthy. There were cases of eye trouble, but few of those serious ailments which are the result of departure from the simple life.

Noticing the great quantities of olive oil consumed by each family, I enquired if there was much appendix trouble in the village. They seemed scarcely to know what I was referring to. The farming community on the whole is peaceful enough, at least from an external point of view, though sometimes a trivial incident will cause much angry excitement. For instance, a stranger came tearing through the narrow street of Cana, driving a primitive-looking Ford. Filled with his own importance, and irritated by the tardiness of a shepherd in getting his flock out of the way, he leaned out of his car and shouted to the cause of the obstruction, "Curse your father!"

The shepherd, stung by the insult, replied with the worst curse which his lips could frame: "Curse your father's beard!"

The natural politeness and tolerance so common to the East had evaporated in a moment.

Unless such arguments are nipped in the bud, they may readily degenerate into something far more serious. There is a rather ominous saying in these lands: "The longer a man's tongue, the shorter his life." This may have something to do with the extreme politeness of the orientals.

The diet of the village people consists largely of vegetables, milk, and fresh and dried fruits. A meal is never complete without bread. Cusa, a small kind of marrow, stuffed with rice, mince meat, and tomato, is much relished by the Palestinians, also cheese made from sheep and goat's milk.

Boiled rancid butter flavoured with garlic is widely used in cooking. At certain seasons of the year, figs, grapes, pomegranates, apricots, and oranges abound.

III

There was one incident I noticed in the day's harvesting at Cana which would interest any Bible student. Under the Mosaic Law, it was permitted for the poor to pick up the gleanings of the harvest fields, to reap the corners of the fields, and to gather the last fruits or berries from the orchards. The rule is still observed in Palestine. I notice that a poor widow woman has been following up the harvesters all day, methodically gleaning straw by straw. We watch her with intense interest; but, alas! there is no kind Boaz, so far as we could see, in the field to-day. None the less, by the time the western sun dips down behind the Carmel range, filling all Galilee with delicate shades of colour, the widow is wending homewards with three or four fat sheaves to her credit.

Through faulty reasoning, this modern Ruth has decided to give the threshing floor a wide berth. "What are three or four sheaves to a great government?" seems to be her line of argument. But it so happened that this very day, the Governor of Nazareth has ridden over to visit the village. He is an abrupt young Australian, who served in Palestine in the First Great War. The woman, bowed beneath the weight of her sheaves, her eyes fastened to the ground, is traversing the last narrow alley-way leading to her stone hovel, when, to her great surprise and consternation, she finds herself confronting the Governor.

"What is this? Where are you taking these sheaves?" he demands in tones of severity.

Much taken aback, the woman pleads her poverty and widowhood, but the Governor, an outspoken young officer of the law, is adamant. Disputes in the Middle East are usually conducted in public, and soon many heads and necks are thrust from neighbouring doors to listen to the angry chiding. Nor is this the end of the matter; for as he turns away, he bids her appear, without fail, at the local court at Nazareth on the following morning.

That evening, as we addressed the villagers who had gathered upon the roof-top of our host's house in the moonlight, to hear the Gospel story, we heard some rather unfavourable comments about the apparent harsh conduct of the British Governor towards the poor widow, comments which, as a Britisher, I was naturally sorry to hear. Next morning, very early, the widow came to my host's house to borrow a donkey; and, placing upon it the sheaves she had gleaned the day before, we saw her wending her way slowly, and, no doubt sadly, up the steep ascent leading from Cana to Nazareth.

At the court the Governor was still adamant, despite the woman's plea of poverty and widowhood.

"If I acquit you, others will do the same thing. No! the law must be carried out. You must know you have no possible right to take wheat home from the harvest field. I must fine you twelve piastres!" (about two shillings and sixpence).

Then, with a quick, almost unobserved movement, as he calls for the next case, he flings the twelve piastres from his own purse across to the clerk, bidding him in an undertone make out a receipt in favour of the poor law-breaker. Completely mystified, the woman does not know for what reason she has received the paper.

No wonder there was much discussion that night in Cana concerning the strange case of the widow and her fine.

"These English are very queer people," said certain of the wiseheads of the village.

"Who before in the history of the land ever heard of a judge who wanted to fine himself?"

IV

Once more stillness has descended upon the sleeping village of Cana, and again the stars shine brilliantly on ancient Galilee. The flocks of sheep are all safely housed within the village folds. The women have drawn their last jar of water from the never-failing spring; and behind the half-built stacks rising gauntly from the threshing floor, men are sleeping in the open, as others have done for millenniums past.

From my bed on the roof-top I can look down upon the whole enchanting scene, and again I muse upon the widow and her fine. Is it not a simple though delightful epitome of the Gospel story? We, the poor ones of earth, bowed down with the gleanings from this world's field, our eyes bent downwards as we traverse, with guilty conscience, the crooked byways of sin, we, too, have each of us run full into the arms of Justice! What have we to say for ourselves? Our case is indeed desperate, for "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But I hear, in reply, those majestic stanzas of the Prophet Isaiah: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53. 4-6).

Thank God! the penalty has been paid, in full, at Calvary.

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power!*

*Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the Fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

A. M. Toplady

v

So musing, I fall asleep on a roof-top in the village where once the Son of God, condescending to grace the wedding feast of a villager and his bride, wrought His first miracle amongst men, by turning the water into wine.

Always it is so. His presence cannot fail to change our disappointment and confusion into unmitigated joy.

Upper and Lower Galilee

I

GALILEE is the name applied to the northern part of Palestine, and consists of two provinces, known as Upper and Lower Galilee. It is bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, which washes the fertile plain of Acre, on which may be counted more villages than in any other part of the country. On the south, Carmel range and the widely-spread plain of Esdraelon divide it from the mountains of Samaria and the maritime plain of Sharon. Eastward are the Jordan River and the Lake of Galilee.

The wild mountainous region of Upper Galilee is really a continuation of the foot-hills of that great snow-capped sentinel of the north, Mount Hermon, from which it is separated by a deep gorge cut by the Litany River. The table-lands of Northern Galilee are wooded with shrubs, stunted oaks, and other species of native trees, while to the east and west, wind fertile valleys, broken with wooded glens, olive trees, and rich corn lands. No part of Palestine is more delightful or picturesque in the spring-time than Galilee. Wild flowers grow in profusion, and the wooded heights of this northern province have, without doubt, much of their pristine picturesqueness and wild beauty.

Travellers in the more frequented parts of Palestine are often disappointed by the absence of foliage on so many of the hills and plains, due to careless deforestation.

This is now being rectified very considerably by government and Jewish plantations.

But in these wilder regions it is pleasing to come upon wooded areas where the native trees of the country grow without molestation. Oaks and carobs are plentiful in the higher regions, while olives, plains, and terebinths provide welcome shelter on the plains.

The massive sycamore, which is a species of wild fig, is often found in proximity to the town or city. The fruit with which this tree is covered is dry and tasteless, and is gathered only by the poor.

The word "Galilee" is derived from a Hebrew word meaning a circle or circuit. Galilee is believed to have received its name because of the cluster of twenty towns surrounding Kadesh-

Naphthali (one of the Cities of Refuge), given by King Solomon to Hiram, King of Tyre, for services rendered by the latter in the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Hence the term "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isa. 9. 1). Later, the name Galilee came to be applied to the whole section of Northern Palestine, including the area as far south as the Plain of Megiddo, and westward to the Mediterranean Sea.

It is interesting to note what the historian Josephus has to say about this fertile province as it was in the days of Roman occupation: "The soil is rich and well-cultivated; fruit and forest trees of all kinds abound; numerous large cities and populous villages, amounting in all to no less than two hundred and forty, thickly stud the whole face of the country; the inhabitants are industrious and warlike, being trained to arms from their infancy."

Galilee, in the days of the twelve tribes of Israel, was inhabited in the west by Zebulun, in the south by Issachar, in the central part by Asher, in the north-west by Naphthali, and in the north-west by Dan.

The references to these tribes by the dying Jacob in Genesis 49 contain subtle hints as to the nature of their future surroundings, as well as the characteristics of the tribe referred to. Zebulun, on the plains of Acre, bordering the sea, was to "offer sacrifices of righteousness," and to "suck of the abundance of the seas, and treasures hid in the sands" (Deut. 33. 19). This was a reference, no doubt, to their future prosperous trading with the Phoenicians and Egyptians. The mention of the sand has perhaps to do with the original glass-manufacturing from the sand found near the Belus River, at Acre.

Asher was to "dip his foot in oil" (Deut. 33. 24), and again, "Out of Asher his head shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties" (Gen. 49. 20), an apparent reference to the rich products of butter, oil and wine, so plentifully produced in this locality. The biggest olive grove to be seen in Palestine is in this area.

In Genesis 49. 14, 15, Issachar is described as a "strong ass crouching down between two burdens," and becoming a "servant unto tribute." Issachar was in occupation of the magnificent plain of Esdraelon; "And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute." Paying tribute was probably part of the penalty for occupying this lucrative position which, however, was really a public highway for kings and conquerors passing and repassing between Egypt and Assyria.

Dan, occupying the north-west of Galilee, as far as the Phœnician Coast, may have been sly and treacherous in his dealings with travellers passing up and down this coastal highway—"a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward" (Gen. 49. 17).

"Naphthali, in the wild regions of Northern Galilee, is well likened to a "hind let loose" (Gen. 49. 21).

All these prophecies go to show that neither Moses nor the aged Jacob were speaking words as men, but as the oracles of God, some of them uttered centuries before the children of Israel had departed out of Egypt.

II

The chief town of Northern Galilee is Safed, one of the so-called Holy Cities of Palestine. Situated at a great altitude, amidst picturesque surroundings, it commands a superb view of the country around, and looks directly down a valley to the Lake of Galilee. Some suppose it to be the "city set on a hill," referred to by the Lord, as it is visible from almost every direction. It was one of the cities fortified by Josephus, and one of the last places to hold out against the Romans. The Jews have a particular love for the place, and some of their most treasured books have been written by the great Rabbis who lived and wrote and were buried there.

At Meron, some few miles from Safed, is the tomb of the famous Jewish scholar, Hillel, and his thirty pupils, and each year great numbers of Jewish pilgrims resort here. For days and nights on end they feast and celebrate by singing, dancing and reciting.

Last century Safed was partially destroyed by a disastrous earthquake, many of the houses slipping down the hillsides, with great loss of life. The climate of the place is delightful in summer, and many resort to it to escape the heat of the lowlands and the maritime plain with its humidity.

III

Some years ago, whilst staying in this town, I journeyed, in company with a native Palestinian friend, from Safed, through the wilds of Northern Galilee. We hired donkeys for the trip. One of our objectives was the mysterious and somewhat inaccessible village of Pekeem, the one and only spot in Palestine, so it is said, where Jews have lived in unbroken continuity from the days of the Romans till now. Here they have continued to worship, according

to the Law, in their original and ancient synagogue. *En route* we visited Meroon, and also stayed two nights at a village, said by the local people to have been the home of the Prophet Obadiah. From this village we had a charming and unobstructed view of snow-capped Hermon, and those majestic slopes inhabited by the mysterious Druses.

Unfortunately for us, we had to sleep on the floor of a public guest-chamber, where the vermin was so plentiful that I decided, during the night, to shift my posse to the village threshing floor in the open. Here many of the villagers were already sleeping beside their partly-threshed stacks of wheat and barley. In the early hours of the morning, however, I found myself again in difficulty, this time from the heavy dew-fall from Hermon, which had descended so copiously that my head and blankets were quite wet, and I felt cold and clammy. I found my fellow-traveller, whom I had left in the guest-chamber, awake and bemoaning his condition, as he had forgotten to bring with him a device of his brother's for meeting just such an emergency. It consisted, he told me, of a sort of elongated pillow-slip, made large enough to accommodate the body with the exception of the head. This was tied closely round the neck from the inside; a very effective contraption, it would seem, though a little awkward perhaps in case of emergency or sudden alarm.

For my own part I have found, on these occasions, that a good Siegfried Line of insect powder, sprinkled in the economical form of an ellipse round the person of the would-be sleeper, is a pretty sound defence, resulting in expensive casualties to the attacking force! The best device of all is to carry with one, if possible, a light folding camp-cot, with a clean sheet, rug, and pillow-slip. There is tremendous satisfaction in having one little clean island sanctuary effectually isolated from the doubtful mainland. As it was, we had to set off on our journey the following morning with the appearance of men suffering from a mild attack of measles or scarlet fever.

IV

The experience on the threshing-floor had given me a better understanding of that precious little gem, Psalm 133: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that

descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

This heavenly unity, which should exist amongst Christian believers, is here likened to the precious dew which, distilled by that great natural condenser of the north, Mount Hermon, falls in the silent watches of the night on sleeping Galilee, bringing greenness, growth, and fruitfulness, where there might otherwise have been bareness and barrenness. It is likewise noteworthy that this sweet heavenly unity so productive of spiritual blessing, can come only from above. Human ingenuity, arrangement, and organisation can never produce it. Union is no synonym for unity. Union may be man-made. Unity must descend. It starts from the head of the Great High Priest, flowing gently downward to the members of His body, imparting blessing to all around.

Before taking our departure from this village we visited the ruins of an ancient Jewish synagogue, dating from Roman times, and still in a fine state of preservation. About sixty feet in length, and forty feet in width, it had been a very handsome structure in its time. It furnished a fine example of the detailed ornamentation used by the Jews in their ancient synagogues, and bore a distinct similarity to the remains of the synagogues at Capernaum, Kadesh-Naphthali, and other places.

Pushing on to the north-west, we came to a village having a somewhat doubtful reputation, and known as the Village of the Robbers. We had, however, quite a polite reception from the Mukhtah, or head man, and his friends, who regaled us liberally with sweets and coffee. Perhaps they had learned by experience to treat with respect all supposed officers of the law who paid them a visit, especially by day. We noticed in this village a hoary old fig tree, with branches creeping along the ground, supposed to be centuries old.

The country now became as wild as it was picturesque, with deep wooded ravines, and a complete absence of roads. At one particularly lonely spot my friend persisted in entertaining me by relating hair-raising robber stories. He informed me that the last time he had passed this locality there was a murdered man lying beside the mountain track, evidently done to death by robbers whilst he was returning home.

V

It was well on in the afternoon when, having traversed with our donkeys a particularly difficult rocky ravine, we arrived safely at

Pekeem. The houses were so old, and were so tightly packed together that their combined roof space appeared like open fields, with tracks running in various directions. Here, dwelling side by side, in apparent harmony, were Moslems, Druses, Greek Orthodox Christians, and Jews. Perhaps this was because the place seemed almost completely cut off from the rest of the world with its inflammatory politics; and one could well understand why the Jews had been allowed to live on here, undisturbed perhaps, through the centuries. Not even the Roman conquerors would have had the heart to traverse such wild country, unless for some very special reason.

It was quite a thrill to visit the old Jewish synagogue with its massive arches, blackened with use and antiquity, probably in continuous use from Roman times. Here seemed to be one really living link with the past. As we entered this ancient meeting-place, now gloomy and overshadowed by surrounding buildings, it seemed almost a miracle that a handful of patriots, defying outside persecution and tyranny, should have clung so tenaciously to their ancient land of Palestine, in hopeful anticipation, it may be, of better days to come, and the return of the Jews, spoken of so freely by all the prophets, days which their descendants are beginning to see, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years.

•

*HOW pleasant to me thy deep blue wave,
O Sea of Galilee!*

*For the glorious One who came to save
Hath often stood by thee.*

*Fair are the lakes in the land I love,
Where pine and heather grow,
But thou hast loveliness above
What nature can bestow.*

*It is not that the wild gazelle
Comes down to drink thy tide,
But He that was pierced to save from hell
Oft wandered by thy side.*

*Graceful around the mountains meet,
Thou calm, reposing sea;
But ah! far more, the beautiful feet
Of Jesus walked by thee.*

*Those days are past—Bethsaida, where?
Chorazin, where art thou?
His tent the wild Arab pitches there,
The wild reed shades thy brow.*

*Tell me, ye mouldering fragments, tell,
Was the Saviour's city here?
Lifted to heaven, has it sunk to hell,
With none to shed a tear?*

*O Saviour! gone to God's right hand,
Yet the same Saviour still,
Graved on Thy heart is this lovely strand,
And every fragment still.*

R. Murray McCheyne

CHAPTER XVIII

First Impressions of Lake Galilee

I

THE road running north from Cana turns suddenly to the east along a broad valley, then across undulating country till we reach the plain of Ahma, almost on the brink of the Jordan depression. Standing up from the left of this small plain, and visible on account of its elevated platform for many miles around, is a well-known landmark called the "Horns of Hattin." On this plain, in the year 1187, that astute and chivalrous warrior, Saladin, hopelessly defeated our Crusader army. The European knights in shining armour who made their final stand on this knoll of Hattin were either slain or captured to a man.

A few minutes after passing this battle ground, there breaks suddenly upon our vision a basin which is about 600 feet below sea-level, and thousands of feet from where we are standing, the Lake of Galilee. Viewed from this distance, it looks very like a colossal turquoise twelve miles long and about half as wide. The tiny white flecks dotting its mirror-like surface, apparently no bigger than pins' heads, are the sails of Galilean fishing boats.

The day has been scorching hot, but, as we wind our way steadily downwards from the summit of the immense Ghor, or Jordan depression, our eyes scan with eagerness the entrancing picture below us, and we long to reach the hallowed water's edge.

If it be true that there is nothing quite so vivid as one's first impression of a scene, I will quote some paragraphs from a diary written at the time of my first visit to the lake:

"I am sitting, alone, upon a water-worn boulder by the margin of the lake. The coolness of the water upon the feet is delightful after a day of travel.

"Opposite to where I am sitting, and across the lake, the hill country of the Gadarenes rises like a forbidding rampart, yet softened somewhat by the setting sun and swathed with a mantle of pinkish purple which changes in tone each moment, as the sun sinks lower and lower in the west.

"Every crevice, every glen is distinctly visible. Somewhere over there, far below the brow of the plateau, the restored

demoniac must have watched, with astonishment, the herd of swine rushing pell-mell down the mountain side to the water.

"Away to the left, at the head of the lake, two giant trees mark the place where the Jordan enters Galilee. Nearer along the shore the sites of Bethsaida and Capernaum on the small, fertile plain of Gennesaret, are also marked by patches of green foliage.

"Nothing I have ever seen has impressed me more than the scene now spread before me, and words of expression seem very poor and inadequate. My eyes see, no doubt almost identically, what the Lord and His fishermen disciples must have often looked upon. Every landmark, every bend in the water's edge, must be largely now as then.

"The immortal words uttered on Gennesaret by the sublime Teacher of all ages still reverberate with undiminished power in millions of human hearts the world over. One feels deeply privileged in being permitted to look upon a scene of earth so much endeared to all true believers through the reading of the Scriptures.

"Even the wistful recollection that He was rejected by many whom He had honoured here with His presence brings the comforting thought that this Galilee is not finished with Him yet.

"A thousand years are with Him as but a day; and again His feet may tread these hallowed shores where once He healed and fed the needy multitudes; again the prancing waves may yield obedience to His sovereign word. . . .

"The lake is changing from blue to green, and again to a darker hue, matching the oncoming darkness. Little wavelets are beginning to trouble its placid surface, and break at one's feet as if in play; for no water is so quick to change its mood as Galilee . . .

"Night has fallen and the stars are peeping out. . . . I retrace my steps to the hotel in old Tiberias, thankful in heart and thinking of loved ones far away.

"5th June. I rise early. The weather is slightly overcast, an unusual thing, one understands, for this season of the year. The lake is ruffled, and has taken on a greenish hue.

"After breakfast I walk around Tiberias and call on the well-known medical missionary, Dr. C——. He is a Scot, with a keen sense of humour.

"'England is our best colony!' he remarked, with a twinkle in his eye.

"'Have you ever written a book?' I asked, knowing something of his many-sided interests and knowledge of affairs in the Middle East.

" 'Man, I have not! That's my special distinction.' *"

"I accompany the doctor down to the south of the lake. We cross the bridge just at the outlet, and visit one of the Jewish colonies a little to the south, known as Dagania.

"The colony is picturesque, and seems to be prosperous and up-to-date. It seems all so queer to hear even the smallest Jewish children prattling in the language of their ancestor David, a language till quite recently used only by scholars, and considered dead.

"We ask ourselves, 'Whence this miracle?' and for answer our minds revert to Matthew 24, and we think of 'the fig tree putting forth its leaves.'

"The doctor chatted with some of the children in Hebrew. They seem frank and intelligent. They are lightly clad and sun-tanned. The colonists appear mostly young and vigorous people, combining energy, idealism, and scientific application in their work."

II

No soil seems to respond more quickly to cultivation than does that of Palestine. It is either barren through neglect or highly productive through good management. Above all, it needs water. Then the pent-up fertility seems to declare itself in a manner that is truly astonishing. Let not critics smile at the Bible description of Palestine as being a "good land," and one "flowing with milk and honey"; for milk indicates the presence of animals; honey, of vegetation, of which there was an abundance in the days of the country's prosperity.

Taking this colony as a specimen, it is obvious that, given thorough cultivation and irrigation, the most complete barrenness may be quickly transformed into luxuriant fertility. I was informed on good authority that this little paradise to the south of the lake was, not many years ago, only a piece of parched ground, devoid of vegetation or utility. My personal opinion is that given peace and settlement, which is again promised to the land, during the Millennial reign, there is no reason why Galilee and its surrounding shores should not become one of the most charming and popular winter resorts in the Middle East.

The Hot Springs of Tiberias are just south of the town and by the shore of the lake. From Roman times, and even before, the mineral waters of this spa have always formed a great attraction. The baths, under the Turkish regime, were poorly managed, but

* He has since written a book.

have been much improved of late. The water seems to compare very favourably with the spas of other countries, and I found that some skin irritation which had been caused by gnat bites, and a persistent foot blister were greatly relieved by the minerals.

Behind the town is a steep mountain overlooking the lake, on the side of which, upon a delightful eminence, are the ruins of one of Herod's palaces. The "old fox" seems to have made his den pretty secure by a wall running up the hill and round the back of his palace. Seated amongst the ruins one cannot but think of the departed glory of this artful despot who took off the head of John the Baptist to please a wicked and ambitious woman. Herod afterwards married this Herodias, and went to live at the beautiful town of Cæsarea Philippi. This degraded man and his unlawful wife gave up all to gain the world. Their empty glory has long since departed, but an heritage of judgment yet awaits them, showing how futile it would be to gain the whole world and lose one's own soul.

III

The Jews have been flocking back into Tiberias for years past. In one of their public restaurants I obtained a good meal and a glass of tea with lemon for 1s. 8d. At the table, I engaged in conversation with a young Jew. Hailing probably from Russia, he was non-orthodox, and thus typical of many of his colleagues.

"The Messiah we are looking for is freedom and equality amongst men," he said.

I replied that he was evidently creating a Messiah out of his own ideals, and that Messiah of the Bible was a real Person with Whom the Jews would yet have to deal, both as individuals and also as a nation.

Another young man, to whom I offered a small New Testament, refused it, saying, "My gospel is the gospel of hard work. I have no other."

I pointed out, on the spur of the moment, that this was like the gospel of the poor donkey, which works hard all his life, shakes his ears, and then dies.

My young friend seemed rather nonplussed by the remark.

It is only fair to state that a considerable change has come over many of the Jewish immigrants during the last few years. Owing to the Arab-Jewish strife they have become somewhat chastened, and do not seem quite so sure of their position as they appeared on my first visit to Tiberias. One well remembers being impressed

by seeing thousands of young Jews and Jewesses promenading the streets by night. Arm in arm, they would march in companies, singing snatches of Jewish songs, laughing and talking in noisy tones. Community singing, dancing, and hand-clapping would continue till well after midnight. Much of this effervescence and exuberance seems to have passed in the more cosmopolitan centres. In the light of political happenings of recent years, both in Palestine and on the Continent, there is more of an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty as to what may happen next. Many seem to be realising that whether in Palestine or out of it, the God of Israel's smile of approval is still being withheld. Others again turn an uneasy eye to the statements of the Jewish prophets and wonder whether, after all, this might not be the beginning of "Jacob's Trouble," spoken of in the Scriptures.

It may interest some to know that there is a section of the Jewish community which now takes some pride in claiming Christ as an outstanding Jewish reformer, cut off in His prime through the narrow bigotry of a section of the nation. But that He was the Divine Son of God, destined by prophecy to suffer as the vicarious Sacrifice for sins, they are not willing to admit. Such an admission would alter their whole status in the eyes of the Jewish community.

However, it must in fairness be said that there is an increasing demand for the New Testament Scriptures, especially in the Jewish colonies, of which there are now about one hundred and seventy throughout the land. I have seen young Jews struggling to gain possession of a last copy being given away in the colonies; and many copies are purchased willingly from travelling colporteurs. It would probably be safe to say that a good number of Jews, deep down in their hearts, are beginning to wonder, or even to believe, that perhaps, after all, the One Who, according to Isaiah 53 was "despised and rejected of men" might after all, be indeed the Jewish Messiah.

I V

One morning I arose early to see, for the first time, a sunrise on Lake Galilee. It was a beautiful and memorable sight. Then, having breakfasted I went down to the shore, and was rowed out some distance by a party of fishermen. It was real thrill to sit in a rough Galilean fishing boat propelled by big, uncouth oars, which dipped into the glassy surface of the lake. Then, to my surprise, someone began to sing in broken English: "O Galilee! Sweet Galilee!"

This was evidently not the first time they had rowed English visitors on the lake. Perhaps it was the extra backsheesh, and not the Saviour, about which they were thinking. None the less, it sounded peculiarly sweet to hear these familiar words sung in broken English and under such conditions. Tiberias and the shore looked most picturesque from the boat.

Although its surface is usually calm and peaceful, Galilee is fitful in its mood, as many an unsuspecting boatman has found to his cost. It can, in a matter of a few moments change its smiling face and become extremely dangerous. Let no ocean-goer smile at the Bible narratives of storms arising on Galilee. The question put by the Apostle, "Master! carest Thou not that we perish?" was no idle question. Whipped to sudden fury by fickle air currents descending the surrounding wadis, this sheet of usually placid water becomes more difficult to negotiate than the ocean; and in the most violent storms, huge breakers dash upon the shore with a roar like thunder.

One can well understand why the disciples were so nervous the night they essayed to cross from Bethsaida Julius to the plain of Gennesaret, especially as they had not the Master on board with them. Sometimes He allows us to try out our own feeble efforts. But though we may fail to bring the boat to land, He is, none the less, deeply interested in all our affairs, and will not fail to come to our aid in His own good time; then we value Him more than ever.

On one occasion I was travelling by boat, accompanied by my wife, along the coast of the little plain of Gennesaret, towards Capernaum. We headed out from a fascinating little cove, where pink oleanders grew in profusion from amongst the water-worn boulders.

Tradition claims that in this cove the Lord addressed the multitude from the boat.

"And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude sat on the shore."

No sooner had we commenced our journey than a light wind sprang up suddenly, and the two fishermen had trouble in getting us to our destination. We had, however, the satisfaction of knowing that we were not far from the shore, and not out on the inky deep, as was the case with the Apostles. I am informed it is much safer to sail upon the lake before noon, as most of the storms arise later in the day.





TIBERIAS

A SECTION OF THE NEW HEBREW COLONY, WITH THE ROLLING HILLS OF GALILEE IN THE
BACKGROUND SHADOWED BY THE RISING SUN (Chap. xviii)

Photo: Exclusive News Agency Ltd.

Here is a charming sight, a flock of fat-tailed sheep, snow white, drinking from the edge of the lake. Some of the tails appear to weigh ten or twelve pounds, and the fat is much prized as an article of diet.

The reflection of the sheep in the water is perfect, and we think of the Shepherd's Psalm: "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

A little further along the edge of the lake, and not many yards from the shore, a large rock stands out of the water. Although, when the water of the lake is low, the rock is quite near the shore, it is never, at any time, connected with the mainland.

The Scottish doctor told me that upon this rock there was, for many generations a large ant colony. One night a boatman chanced to leave a rope suspended from the rock to the shore. Now the chance of many ant lifetimes had come. In the morning the ants had all vanished from the rock. It almost seems as though they had decided, by mutual consent, to say good-bye to this Robinson Crusoe kind of life which had been their lot for so many generations. How they fared when they had passed over this temporary suspension bridge, we do not know. After facing competition and the battle of life on the mainland, they might have been glad to return to their island sanctuary.

A little farther round the shore from the ants' citadel is the site of Magdala. It stands at the very beginning of the fascinating little plain of Gennesaret, which is about three miles long and one mile wide.

The historian Josephus, writing about the time of Christ, makes an interesting comment about the plain, which reads as follows:

"Extending along the Lake of Galilee, and bearing also its name, lies a tract of country, admirable both for its natural properties, and for its beauty.

"Such is the fertility of the soil that it rejects no plant, and accordingly all are here cultivated by the husbandmen; for so congenial is the air that it suits every variety.

"The walnut grows luxuriantly with the palm, and here are figs and olives. It produces the grape and the fig for ten months without intermission, while the other varieties ripen the year round; for besides being favoured by the genial temperature of the air, it is irrigated by a highly-fertilising spring called Capernaum (meaning either the Garden of Flowers or the Garden of the Prince)."

We cannot pass the reputed site of Magdala without thinking

of the woman called Mary who once lived here, and out of whom the Lord cast seven devils. Her deep love and gratitude brought her subsequently into very close fellowship with her Lord; and for her was reserved the unique honour of being the first human being to be addressed by the Risen Christ.

V

As we commence to traverse the plain of Gennesaret, we pass quite close to the entrance of a mighty gorge known as the Wady Hamam, or Valley of Pigeons. No doubt this was once the natural pass traversed by the main highway running from Damascus to Egypt. It is said that from the precipitous sides of the gorge numbers of wild pigeons were trapped and sold in Jerusalem for temple sacrifice. To this day flocks of these birds circle round amongst the rocky ledges. I once climbed with a friend some distance up one side of the gorge. In the rocky face there had been cut, by robbers and refugees of past ages, labyrinths of holes, rooms, passages, and stairways. Indeed, so strong and impregnable was this robbers' lair, that even the methodical Romans were baffled for years in their assault upon the place. Josephus gives a vivid account of the last great assault upon this stronghold during the reign of Herod the Great, when, by means of iron cages lowered from the top by stout chains of iron, the soldiers at length gained a footing in the precipitous sides, ultimately gaining the upper hand. No doubt this was but a temporary check to the robbers, for the stronghold is still in such a state of preservation that hunted men could easily find ample refuge in it.

But here comes a solitary rider upon a camel. Weary with his long journey, he dismounts at the entrance to the wady, hitches his camel to a boulder, and begins to prepare a midday meal. Producing from his saddle-bag a round convex iron plate, he places this upon two stones, and underneath it lights some dry thorns. While the plate is heating, he takes flour, moistens it with water, squeezes it into the shape of a disc, and throws it upon the plate. While it is cooking, he lies flat on the ground, and covers his face with his camel-hair robe. The whole process has taken but a few moments from the time he alighted. Indeed, so deft and simple is his technique that the most up-to-date housewife would be left standing open-mouthed.

Tearing apart the smoking damper with his long Bedouin fingers, he offers me, with true Arabic etiquette, part of his rough-and-ready repast, which I receive with the best grace possible.

Inwardly, however, I have serious misgivings. Perhaps it is unkind of me to notice that the unwashed hands of my impromptu host now appear very much cleaner as a result of his baking operations.

Continuing our journey from the gorge about three miles along the plain, we climb over a ridge and arrive at the Latin Hospice of Tabgha, beautifully situated upon the shores of the lake, where the town of Bethsaida is supposed to have stood. This must not be confused with the Bethsaida Julius which is on the north of the lake across the Jordan. The garden of the Hospice is luxuriant, and quite tropical in appearance. Many travellers prefer to remain here for a day or two and bathe or sail on the lake. It is the most charming spot around the shores of Galilee. Recently an old mosaic was discovered under the soil of the garden, illustrating a fishing incident in connection with the disciples. No doubt Peter, James, and John knew every inch of the shore at this point. A big spring is found in close proximity. A Roman water-race has been cut through solid rock from the spring to the shore of the lake. Not far distant are the remains of an ancient khan where Saladin is supposed to have camped with his army the night before the battle with the Crusaders on the plain above. Another great soldier in the person of Napoleon once camped at the other end of the plain, not far from Magdala.

From Tabgha, another two miles along the margin of the lake brings us to the site of Capernaum, where the Lord once resided. The only present habitation at this spot is a Latin monastery, built amongst the ruins of the ancient town. A main highway of the Romans once passed via Capernaum, from across the northern head of the lake; but at the present time, both the sites of Capernaum, and its neighbouring town of Chorazin are isolated.

By far the most interesting object of interest at Capernaum is the ruined Jewish synagogue now uncovered and partially re-erected by the monks of the place. Visitors hoping to get away with a fragment of the ruins are watched with vigilance by the monks, who hope to be able some day to reassemble the fragments of this one-time beautiful structure.

The steps leading up to the floor of the building, and the "chief seats" of the synagogue are still *in situ*, and it is interesting to reflect that it is quite possible that the feet of our Lord, and those of His Apostles passed up and down these very steps on the day He healed the man with the withered arm, or that on which he healed Peter's wife's mother. It is possible, too, that the

reference in Luke 7 may have been to this building standing then in all its beauty. "And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto Him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought Him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom He should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue."

It is at least noteworthy that the keystone of the arch of the main entrance is still preserved, and upon it can be traced the remains of two Roman eagles, and a Roman scollop shell. The eagles have been tampered with, perhaps by some Jewish zealot during the bitter struggle against the Romans; just as some Hindoo might to-day interfere with the British coat of arms upon some public building in India. What makes this synagogue still more interesting is the fact that it was probably the one described in detail by Queen Helene, mother of Constantine, in the fourth century A.D. In later years it was shaken by a severe earthquake, and remained for centuries covered by debris till its recent excavation by the monks. The two flights of steps, which have remained quite undisturbed, tally in number and description with that given in detail by Helene. The whole building was constructed with beautiful white alabaster, and the fallen blocks still ring like a bell when struck.

A row of a few miles from Capernaum across the head of the lake, beyond the entrance of the Jordan, brings us to Bethsaida Julius. It seems rather puzzling that the ruins of this fishing town, instead of being upon the shore of the lake, as one would naturally expect, are about a mile from the water's edge, near the foot of a hilly slope. The explanation, however, seems quite simple. For the nineteen centuries since the days of the Apostles, the River Jordan has been depositing its silt at the head of the lake, causing the land to encroach a considerable distance southward from the grassy foot-hills where the Lord is supposed to have fed the five thousand.

Had the Lord listened to the suggestion of the disciples to send the multitude away, this great company of needy people might have gone without an evening meal. The hasty calculation about the five loaves and the two fishes was all awry, seeing they had forgotten to include, in their sum total, the Lord Himself. This is a miscalculation common to most believers.

"Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them

to eat." Profound words are these. In the great realm of spiritual affairs let those who know Him never be found rushing hastily away to the world's villages to buy their bread. We need not depart from Him Who is the Bread of Life, for is it not written, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4. 19).

VI

On my first visit to Tiberias I happened to contact a young Palestinian local guide, named N——. He was a bright young fellow, and spoke English fluently. We had called at a number of interesting places around the lake and in the town, including one very old caravansary or halting place. We seemed to be back once more in the dawn of history, as we looked upon the scene. The ancient building, with its groined arches and small barred windows set high up in the stone walls, was dimly lighted, dusty, and bedecked with cobwebs. The whole khan was wrapped in silence, though crowded with inmates. Tired donkeys slept with noses resting on the ground. Camels, in every stage of exhaustion lay around, some quietly chewing the cud as they stared around with big soft eyes of brown; others were sound asleep, storing up strength for another day of hard, grinding toil on the morrow. Some of the animals had come from the distant Transjordan, as could be seen by the distinctive trappings lying about. Weary drivers lay here and there amongst their donkeys and camels, dead to the world, and utterly regardless of the possibility of being trodden upon. Though the night was still young, both men and beasts had been asleep for hours, and would be off at dawn. This was the way the patriarchs had travelled five thousand years ago, and this is the way these men of the Bible lands will be travelling to-morrow.

Before retiring to my hotel for the night, my young guide friend insisted upon my accompanying him to his home to meet his mother and sisters, all of whom, he assured me, could speak my language.

Climbing a flight of stone steps in the old part of the town, I was ushered into the guest room of a typical Palestinian home, and was received with true Arabic hospitality, any surprise at an Englishman calling upon them at such a late hour, or indeed at any hour, being carefully concealed. The mother insisted on frying some steak for supper, which, with the native bread, was certainly most appetising after our strenuous rounds. Sitting round upon divans,

we afterwards sipped coffee and conversed, while some of the party who were unable to follow the conversation in English had to depend upon translation.

Somehow or other, the name of our hostess seemed to be familiar to my ear, though I did not know why.

"Was your husband fighting in the first Great War?" I ventured to ask her.

"Yes!" she replied. "He went away with the Turkish army, and I never saw or heard from him again."

"Does your Christian name happen to be S——?" I asked.

She answered with some surprise in the affirmative.

"Then I think I have a photo of you and your children away down in my home in New Zealand."

All looked greatly astonished, and, to their intense delight, we proceeded to unravel the story. It appeared that the mother, left with a number of children, had to earn her living by making and selling lace locally and to tourists visiting the country. It happened that a friend of mine, having spent some time in Palestine, had come, through buying lace, to know this woman and her family. He had given me a photo of her, with the solemn injunction that, should I be in Galilee I was to look her up and convey to her the greetings of himself and his family. So here, in this unexpected place, we had met together.

Though the hour was late when I said good-bye to our kind hostess and her neighbours, her son N——insisted on accompanying me to my lodgings. The lake was shimmering in the moonlight and looked most tempting.

"You really must try a swim before retiring," he said coaxingly.

"But what about bathing togs," I ventured to ask.

N—— smiled and suggested that illustrious people had bathed in Galilee for thousands of years without such devices. So we strolled along the shore till well past the environment of the sleeping town when, finding a sequestered cove we were soon enjoying a delightful swim in the calm and tepid water of the lake. Thus ended one of my first happy days in Galilee.

*HIS be the Victor's name,
Who fought our fight alone;
Triumphant saints no honour claim,
Their conquest was His own.*

*Through weakness, like defeat,
He won the meed and crown;
Trod all our foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down.*

*He hell in hell laid low;
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death, by dying, slew.*

*Bless, bless the Conqueror slain,
Slain by divine decree!
Who lived, who died, who lives again,
For thee, my soul, for thee!*

S. W. Gandy

CHAPTER XIX

Calvary and the Garden Tomb

I

OUTSIDE the North Wall of the Old City of Jerusalem, immediately opposite the inconspicuous entrance to the underground quarries of Solomon, and some one hundred and fifty yards from the Damascus Gate, there rises a rocky knoll to the height of about sixty feet, known to all the world as Gordon's Calvary. All things considered, belief in the Garden Site, as it is sometimes called, as being the most likely place for the Lord's passion, burial and resurrection, seems to be gaining ground. The detailed description of the Crucifixion scene, as given in the Gospels, seems to fit in naturally with the topography of this place as it does with no other site in or around the city.

It is only natural that there should be a deep interest, accompanied by a spirit of reverent enquiry and curiosity concerning the place so sacred to the hearts of all true believers. But we have to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit, for some reason we may only surmise, has seen fit to leave us in doubt as to the exact spot on which there once took place the greatest event that ever happened in the history of this world.

Also, we cannot but protest against the pernicious practice of fixing sites, as is so often done in the land of Palestine, merely for the convenience and prestige of local religious communities, or even for the still more unworthy motive of making gain from the credulity of pilgrims and visitors.

When, for instance, you have pointed out to you the burial place of Moses (one of the Divine secrets), or when you are continually stumbling upon tombs of the Prophet Jonah, from Palestine to the banks of the Tigris in Iraq, one suspects either ignorance or unworthy motive, or both.

Another serious aspect of the matter is that holy sites, whether real or imaginary, play no vital part in real Christianity. "The just shall live by faith," is the divine dictum; not by visiting holy sites, by relics, pilgrimages, feast days, or traditional rites and ceremonies. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and

years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4. 10, 11).

But the reader may still ask, "Are there sites in Palestine really genuine, and of practical value to the visitor?" Most certainly there are. Palestine has well been described as a valuable commentary on the Bible. Meyer went so far as to call it a "fifth Gospel," in throwing light on Christ's life and actions while on earth. Be this as it may, we are all aware that visual impressions and the law of association play no small part in the working of the mind. By personal experience we can testify to the intense delight of retreading, and beholding, in a general way, those scenes which we know must have been familiar to the Lord, His disciples and to the patriarchs of old. Despite the changes and vicissitudes brought about by time, Olivet still overlooks the city; Jordan still winds its course to the Dead Sea; storms still arise on the lake of Galilee, and the setting sun still illumines the rugged ramparts of Moab. These, and countless other features remain substantially the same.

If a cold, printed map of Palestine, hung on the classroom wall, gives scholars a more intelligent interest in the Scripture narrative, then what must be the effect of seeing the country itself? Journeys, and towns and characters which are often vague when read about, seem to come to life when we know the topography of the locality. We see why certain cities were built on certain sites, or why they fit into the narrative; and we see why the Holy Spirit has chosen to record certain facts that we had previously passed over almost without notice. Though we freely concede that a person may attain to the highest state of spiritual development without ever having seen the land of Palestine, we have no hesitation in saying that a visit to that land, especially by those who love the Bible and its Author, can afford, in spite of some distressing experiences, the most exquisite delight and profit.

Thomson, in his classical work, "The Land and the Book," writes as follows concerning Palestine:

"I seem to find in this uncertainty which hangs over any sacred locality, the indications of a watchful Providence, in beautiful accordance with many similar interpretations, to save God's people from idolatry. The grave of Melchizedek, the typical priest of Joshua, the captain and leader into the Land of Promise; of David, the shepherd and king; of John the Baptist and Forerunner, and of many of whom all nations shall call blessed, the tombs of all these have been irrecoverably concealed, and the same watchful care

has hid for ever the instruments of the Saviour's passion, the exact spot where He was crucified, and where He rose again to life, and also the place from which He ascended into Heaven. I would have it thus . . . We have no need of these fictitious sites to confirm our faith. We are surrounded by witnesses, and these mountains and valleys and ruins that cannot be effaced or corrupted."

His summary, too, concerning these sites is excellent:

"These eyes gaze up to the same Heaven which opened to receive Him ascending to the Father's right hand. The great atoning Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and every item of it, was offered up here, on this unquestioned platform of the Holy City. This is all I care for, all that mere topography can offer. If sure to the fraction of an inch in regard to the sepulchre I could no more worship it than I could worship the boat in which He sailed to Gennesaret or the ass on which He rode into Jerusalem. Hence I have no need of any of these inventions; and since they have been perverted to an idolatry worse than the burning of incense to the Brazen Serpent, I would have them all removed out of my sight, that He, Who is a Spirit, may be worshipped, even at Jerusalem, in spirit and in truth."

But there is a very great difference between trading with sites and relics and that legitimate interest in the topography of the country, and the honest attempt to locate, if possible, ancient cities and places. How could it be possible, for instance, to visit Jerusalem without casting the eye about for the possible scene of the Lord's crucifixion and burial. Scripture has been pleased to give us some most interesting and minute details concerning the site of this stupendous event which affects us all so vitally. It would have us learn that the Lord suffered outside the walls of the city, in a public place called Golgotha, the Place of a Skull: that near by was a garden, in which was a new tomb. So if we can never be sure as to the actual spot of the Crucifixion, we may, at least, view with suspicion those sites which are ruled out by this data. We submit, therefore, the principal facts and arguments favouring the Garden Site as against other places.

I I

1. Gordon's Calvary is, and, as far as most people can judge, always has been, outside the confines of the North Wall of the city; which cannot be said with anything like certainty of the site of the Holy Sepulchre, which is well inside the walls of the present city. The North Wall, as is likely proved by the scarp cut in places from

the solid rock,^f and other data, seems not to have changed its alignment since the time of the Romans.

2. The knoll called Calvary is just outside the busy Damascus Gate; and the huge Roman building stones at the base of the gate, as well as the still more ancient foundations beneath the present surface, show conclusively that the gate was standing on this site both during, and probably before, the Roman times, therefore also when the Crucifixion occurred.

3. If you dig beneath the rubble at the foot of the mound of Calvary, you come upon the original Roman road which forked here, one branch going north to Galilee, the other round the city to Jericho. Hence there would be many passers-by, as is pointed out in the narrative.

4. The Romans executed their criminals publicly, probably as a warning to the people. The hill now known as Calvary was called by the Jews the "Hill of Stoning," which suggests that it was a place of public execution even in Jewish days. The reason of its suitability for this purpose seems clear. Like the stage of some Greek theatre, it is so placed that it can be overlooked by a large part of the city, ranged round it in a semi-circle.

5. Immediately at the foot of the knoll is an ancient garden, now uncovered. The removal of debris has brought to light garden paths, an irrigation system and a winepress.

6. In the rocky base of the knoll which rises straight from the garden, is a solitary tomb, not quite completed, with one loculus, or place of interment ready for use.

7. It is a Jewish tomb, as can be distinctly seen by the characteristic niche cut in the rock at the head of the loculus, made to receive the head of the person buried there. Only Jewish tombs are constructed in this way.

8. The two ledges, one at the head and the other at the foot of the loculus, upon which it would have been possible for the angels to have sat, are present in no other tombs in or around the city, so far as the writer is aware.

9. During excavations made at this place some years ago, a marble slab, with a Greek inscription, was found by workmen in close proximity to the tomb. It read as follows: "Buried near his Lord." This inscription, not being to the liking of so many inhabitants of the city, has been withdrawn from public inspection.

10. The knoll itself bears a sinister resemblance to a skull; and we know that both the words "Calvary" and "Golgotha" mean "a skull" or "a bare skull."

11. The fact that the Romans erected near the tomb a pagan shrine, may have indicated a desire to discourage the Christians from resorting or building here.

12. The fact also that the place has always been unadorned by shrines, etc., seems more in its favour than otherwise, and in keeping with the veil of uncertainty which hangs over so many of the more important sites, as already alluded to.

Having stated these points of popular evidence, we again fall back on the really inspiring fact, not so much as to which might or might not be the identical site upon which the Lord was crucified, but that somewhere in proximity to the walls of this ancient city, somewhere "outside the camp," as detailed in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus Christ paid the full price of our redemption by His blood.

III

One spring morning, in Jerusalem, I awakened from sleep at an unusually early hour. Looking from my window across the depths of Hinnom, I noticed that the sun seemed still to be far below the sky-line of the grey mountains of Transjordan. Even those early risers, the fellaheen, had not yet begun streaming city-wards from the surrounding villages. Jerusalem was still sleeping, and faithful Olivet, tinged with the first faint streaks of dawn, was keeping guard. It was Sunday, the first day of the week, and the resurrection day; so, with a few friends, we had arranged to join hands with our brethren of the past in the hallowed privilege of the Breaking of the Bread and drinking of the cup, in memory of our Lord. It was still much too early for our meeting together in the appointed upper room, and a strong impulse came upon me to seek out some quiet trysting-place, there to meditate upon the crucifixion scene.

For this purpose, no better place could there be than the little knoll outside the North Wall. Setting out, I climbed the rocky face, unobserved by the surly watcher of the Moslem cemetery close by. The luxuriant spring foliage on the summit afforded partial cover, and soon I was lost in uninterrupted contemplation.

*"There is a green hill far away
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all."*

The words kept surging through my brain. Could it be really possible that somewhere within these few square yards, certainly

somewhere near the precincts of this city, now sleeping, the very blood-stream of God's Beloved Son had stained the sin-cursed earth He had come to redeem?

As if symbolic of this crimson stain, a carpet of blood-red poppies spreads itself round about, "lilies of the field," fashioned by the very One Who once hung in weakness betwixt this earth and heaven. One seemed to realise in a strange new way the awfulness of man's self-will, and the price paid by the Son of God to liquidate human guilt. One could visualise the amazing scene—friends, foes, the Roman guards, and the passers-by, all riveting their gaze upon the middle cross. Then follows the eerie darkness at midday, the quaking of the earth, the cry of the penitent thief, "Lord, remember me!" and the reply, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Now from the darkness comes the agonising cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and the final note of triumph, "It is finished!" grandest bulletin that ever gladdened the heart of man, and still reverberating in Heaven and on the earth.

One could see, too, those loving hands taking Him down from the cross; the anointing of the body; the linen wrappings, and the tomb. "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre," a weeping, broken-hearted embodiment of devotion. But that one word, "Mary," spoken by the risen Lord, lifted a heart from the valley of sorrow to the highest pinnacle of transcendent joy. Fortunate woman! Recipient of the first word spoken by the Saviour in resurrection. Then follows that outburst of dynamic force and power, when the little band of disciples, so lately scattered and afraid, close again their ranks at Pentecost, to go forth imbued with power, power that was to turn the world and its philosophy upside down, its Gospel slogan, "Christ crucified and risen again."

I V

From Golgotha and its entrancing scene, my thoughts speed suddenly to a distant land far down in the Pacific waters, where, as a child, I used to gaze upwards at night to that bright constellation all glowing in the heavens, the Southern Cross. I could hear, too, the murmurings of a river, upon whose banks I revelled as a child, with evergreen trees, and mossy grottos, and ferns, and blue kingfishers darting from the river-bank upon the prey. I could see another sacred scene: two sisters, with their younger brother kneeling at a mother's knee, ere starting out schoolwards;

and it was from this mother I had first heard these solemn truths and of the profound significance of the "green hill far away."

At what better place, may one ask, could a human soul learn these things than at a mother's knee? May God, in His great pity, have mercy on the poor child who is denied this blessed privilege, going out each day from a prayerless home to face the dangers of a godless world! Alas, when mothers, missing life's greatest opportunity, fail to impress upon the little plastic minds entrusted to their care for a few transient years, these sublime and eternal verities, pertaining to the most vital of all questions, the salvation of the soul. For to live and die without such knowledge means it were better never to have been born.

Feeling very thankful in heart, I retraced my steps as the city was awakening again to life. Somehow the Cross was a more vivid reality to me than ever before, and my heart overflowed with gratitude for the One Who had suffered in my place. I remembered, too, with thankfulness, the loved one, who, ever seeking to spread abroad His fame, had first unfolded to me, in childhood, the sweetness of His name.

*When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the Cross of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

Isaac Watts

CHAPTER XX

The Phœnician Coast

I

I WALK down to the car terminus opposite the railway station in Haifa, in good time, as I suppose, to secure a front seat, for which I have paid a little extra; but, alas, the seat is already taken. Possession being nine-tenths of the law, I feel it will be more advantageous to retain the goodwill of my fellow-passengers, and of this too-enterprising one in particular, rather than fight for a point of vantage for sight-seeing.

In a few minutes we are speeding through the busy streets of the city, and heading for that delightful curving stretch of coastline connecting Haifa with the ancient town of Acre, which is some eight miles distant. Nearing the shore, we pass, on our right, the Jewish Shemen Company, manufacturers of a well-known brand of soap, next the city abbatoirs, where bald-headed eagles hang round tamely on the look-out for stray offal, and then past the cluster of oil tanks which mark the terminus of the famous pipe line running from Kirkuk in Iraq, a distance of about seven hundred miles.

The run along the wide ocean beach with its firm yellow sand is most exhilarating, and much more interesting than by the new road further inland. Passing over a crazy bridge which spans the mouth of the ancient River Kishon, we are soon on the unbroken stretch of sand between this point and the River Belus, associated in history with the manufacture of the famous Phœnician glass.

Here are fishermen dragging in their net from the sea. There seem to be dozens of them hauling on one long rope. Some are scantily clad, others not clad at all, but all happy and expectant. Already a pile of herring-like fish glisten in the morning sunlight, but surely it will need a good many such piles to compensate all these superb, sun-browned figures for their labours.

We now draw near to Acre, an ancient stronghold with battered walls and bastions, set off with prancing blue waves in the background. How can we help conjuring up pictures of Crusaders, Templars, battles, and sieges?

Acre is one of the ancient cities of Palestine, referred to

in the Book of Joshua, being allotted by this leader to the Tribe of Asher, or, as some think, to Zebulun (Judges 1. 31). Like some scarred old warrior, it still lives on, pointing proudly to wounds received in the heat of battle. On the eastern side, its walls and towers bear the marks of cannon balls fired by the French during the siege by Napoleon. Its seaward side is scarred by the British bombardment of 1840.

Here it was that the Crusading Knights of St. John took up their abode after having been expelled from Jerusalem. The Church of the Templars still exists, but awaits digging out, an impossible operation at present, owing to the surrounding buildings.

Acre, or Ptolemais, as it was later called, was considered by the Crusaders to be the key to Palestine. As one walks through its narrow winding streets, often completely arched over, one feels back again in the days of Richard Cœur de Lion; for here once lived this doughty British monarch and his Queen Catherine. Having the sea on two of its sides, it was the intention of certain of its defenders to make it a detached island fortress by means of a wonderful moat, which, however, was never completed. Even so, the place was strong enough to resist countless attacks, and the successful resistance offered by Sir Sidney Smith to Napoleon's army, may well, from a human point of view, have changed the face of history.

A casual examination of the place, with its walls, moats, scarps, bastions, gateways and citadel of enormous strength, shows it to have been an extraordinary mediæval fortress. One of the sea walls has suffered badly by sea attrition, never having been repaired since the British bombardment.

The inhabitants tell you that a terrible explosion occurred during the bombardment, when a stray shell fell in the powder magazine. Most of the defences, however, are still more or less perfect, and old-fashioned cannon lie about the parapets and disused barracks. In the tunnels under the town myriads of bats congregate.

A few hundred yards from the east of the town is a small mound known as Napoleon's Hill. It is partly artificial, and served as the headquarters for the emperor during the siege. A few years ago, while passing this mound, I saw a large number of big guns, which had just been dug out of the ground where they had been buried by the retreating Napoleon. They were being sent to Europe as scrap iron to be turned, no doubt, into more modern weapons of destruction.

There is a very ancient caravansary or khan in Acre, where camels and donkeys from distant places such as Transjordan or the Hauran unload their produce, and find rest and accommodation. It is not usual to find camels and ships in such close proximity. In days before the rise of Haifa, and when trading ships were of smaller draught, the harbour at Acre must have been a snug little anchorage enclosed with a wall, and presenting a busy and Oriental scene. What with the coming and going of ships of merchandise and Crusading armies, we can well imagine the congestion at this meeting place of East and West.

I I

Continuing northward along the maritime plain of Acre we pass the ancient Roman aqueduct which still brings its delicious water from the famous spring of Kabri. A few miles farther on we come to the celebrated White Promontory of the ancient world, over which passed the well-known Ladder of Tyre. Across this causeway, world conquerors and their armies passed and repassed for countless ages. It is now called Ras el Nakoura, "ras" being the Arabic word for cape. There is a British Frontier Control Office at this place, and it is always a pleasure to watch these stolid young British police at work, examining passports and baggage. Nothing ever seems to ruffle them. In the office, or facing an ugly rush in a street fight, or doing dangerous patrol duty, they have always the same unperturbed manner which is the marvel of the local people.

From the Ladder of Tyre the coastline becomes more rugged and less populated, but at the French Frontier Control the scene again brightens. Foliage and the sweet sound of running water help to repay the traveller for his wait here, and refreshments are served, as in so many places, in the open, amidst shrubs and flowers and butterflies.

To the Phœnician Coast belongs the honour of having the world's pioneer shipping ports still in existence. The Phœnicians once dominated the eastern Mediterranean, being bold and intrepid mariners. Even to this day, the stoutly-built wooden ships you may still see being built along the shore by the descendants of this hardy people serve as a reminder of the past.

There are a few ruins, and a large number of rock-hewn tombs to be seen as one journeys along the coast road. At intervals, the driver of our car pulls up at certain of the shady booths along the roadside, which are formed by trellised vines being trained right

across the main highway. He exchanges a nod and a wink with each of the restaurant keepers whom he seems to know intimately, and informs his passengers that they may rest awhile. Incidentally he regales himself with a drink of arak, or local spirit, probably given as backsheesh by the restaurant man as a *quid pro quo* for new clients. We continue to pass pretty bays and inlets along the rocky coast which the road hugs closely most of the way. The foothills of the Lebanons in many places advance right to the shore line.

III

The first town of any importance to be encountered on the journey after leaving Acre is Tyre. It is prettily situated on a small peninsula jutting seawards, the old mole and harbour still providing shelter for small fishing craft and coastal boats. The inhabitants, numbering about 5000, are mostly fishermen or dyers. The present site of the city was once an island, facing the powerful and prosperous city of Paleotyrus on the mainland opposite. So strong was the city, that it was able to resist the besieging army of the Babylonians for thirteen years.

The Prophet Ezekiel once uttered a remarkable prophecy about Tyre while she was still in her glory, a prophecy which was carried out in the most literal manner at a later date.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God . . . thou shalt be built no more" (Ezek. 26).

Some critical travellers are apt to find fault with this drastic forecast, seeing that Tyre still exists as an organised habitation. A little investigation, however, will soon reveal that the prophecy has been literally and absolutely fulfilled. The first step in the fulfilment was when the wealthy metropolis was reduced and plundered by the Babylonians after a siege of thirteen years. The wary Tyrrians now decided to rebuild their stronghold on an island immediately opposite the ruined city. Centuries later, Alexander the Great, returning from one of his victorious campaigns, was anxious to dislodge this nest of Phoenicians who controlled the eastern part of the Mediterranean. But, alas! a stretch of blue

sea interposed between Alexander and his quarry. What was to be done? Having no fleet at hand, the only way he could hope to succeed was by building a causeway from shore to the island. The material for this causeway was taken from the ruins of the mainland city now abandoned. But still the task was incomplete. So, to finish the causeway, the soldiers actually scraped the remaining dust and rubble from the site of Paleotyrus; the causeway was completed, and the island fortress was reduced.

Other great cities which have passed have at least ruins to testify to their former greatness; the mighty city which was once Tyre has none. The site is absolutely bare. Her very dust has been scraped into the sea; and to-day the fisherman dries his net where once this hive of industry flourished. Who but God could have foreseen the fulfilment of this unique prophecy, never before, and never since pronounced against any other city on earth.

The present town of Tyre is joined to the mainland by a wide sandy belt caused by the silting up of Alexander's causeway; and even to this day the Tyrrian in the street curses the name of this great world-conqueror for spoiling the maritime approach to the town. The heaps of shells sometimes found in the vicinity of ancient Tyre are said to date from the times when the world-famous Tyrrian purple was manufactured from the tiny mollusc, still noticeable along the shore.

It was Hiram, King of Tyre, who assisted King Solomon in the building of the Temple at Jerusalem. Hiram's tomb, built of huge monoliths, still stands, almost intact, a few miles to the east of the ancient city.

I V

Still following the coastline for another twenty miles or so, we now come to Sidon, mother of seaports, and said to have been named by the grandson of Noah. It is in all probability the oldest living city in the world, being mentioned in the Book of Genesis, and also, it is said, in the writings of the poet Homer. The ancient streets, mostly built over, are ridiculously narrow and gloomy. The Sidonians were once the ship-builders for the countries round about. An ancient round tower stands conspicuously on an eminence in the city, and there are several large khans. Part of the old harbour mole still shows above water.

I will always associate Sidon with a somewhat embarrassing, even if amusing, passport episode which happened the first time I passed this way. The French officer at the Frontier Control

farther down the coast had found an omission in my Syrian visa. After due consideration he allowed me to pass the frontier on the one condition that I should call upon the French Governor of Sidon. Leaving the driver, with four other passengers patiently awaiting my return, I proceeded in search of the said Governor upon arrival at Sidon. After some trouble I located his residence on the outskirts of the town. A French lady answered the door. With difficulty I tried to explain my errand.

"But the Governor is now asleep, and I cannot wake him."

I pointed out that it was rather an urgent passport difficulty. She went away and returned with a note addressed to an official in the ancient part of the city. After wandering in and out crooked streets and ancient byways near the water front, I eventually found the officer, and explained my mission.

The officer was quite pleasant and polite, but after much searching amongst rubber stamps, said: "I must now send to the Governor for the right stamp."

All this time my fellow passengers waited patiently, for though the temperament of the East is often hot and hasty in dispute, it is yet capable of the most extraordinary and stolid patience. After a considerable time, a boy appeared with a rubber stamp, and my troubles seemed over. The officer opened my passport, poised the stamp majestically in mid air, but his hand was stayed.

"I am sorry, Messieur. This is not the correct stamp."

My patience was exhausted. I thought of the driver and his passengers and their anger at being delayed. Picking up my passport I strode out of the office, stamp or no stamp. The officer shrugged his shoulders in blank astonishment. Looking back over my shoulder I caught a final glimpse of the Frenchman, still amazed, and still shrugging his shoulders. To my surprise I found the passengers and the driver still waiting and quite unperturbed, so I might just as well have finished my passport formalities. They were evidently better acquainted with Eastern officialdom than I was.

How I found myself wandering round Syria without a proper visa, a defect subsequently discovered and paid for upon leaving the country, and how I warded off two over-inquisitive gendarmes on a long train journey, by feigned affability and the sharing of my scanty rations, causing them alternately mirth and anger by appearing not to understand all their signs to produce my passport, is quite another story.

The gardens around Sidon are luxuriant and well-watered.

Oranges, grapes, pomegranates, and the delicious loquat grow in abundance. In fact all the fruits of the Middle East, including peaches, pears, plums, and bananas, not found in many districts, all grow here.

Between Sidon and Beyrout, the capital of the Lebanon, the country becomes more interesting. The gentle slopes of the Lebanon, descending almost to the seashore, are now covered with olive and mulberry trees. This was once the centre of the silk industry, which is now sadly declining. The olive grove at Shwaifat is the largest in the Middle East, and, I was told, the third largest in the world. It is a literal forest miles in extent, and was the scene of severe fighting during the World War, as the Australian and British troops fought their way towards Beyrout.

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If you examine a map of the Phoenician coast, you will notice that the usually straight coast line is interrupted at intervals by a number of hook-like open harbours, all facing towards the north. Beyrout is on one of these indentations. Always the site of a city, Beyrout has a population of some 250,000 inhabitants, its European appearance being due, no doubt, to its strong French influence.

The Americans have a very large and well-equipped university here, which has played no little part in the culture of this and surrounding countries. The centre of the city has pretty gardens and foundations, and there is a somewhat imposing elevation on which many of the Government offices stand.

The particular charm about Beyrout, however, is the picturesque background of the Lebanon, snow-capped in winter, and cool and delightful during the hot summer months. Villages nestle everywhere, from an altitude of 2000 feet up to 4000 or 5000 feet. The lights from these summer resorts show up brilliantly at night. The roads to and from the mountains are splendidly constructed with asphalt, and the traffic in summer is almost continuous. Not only the rich, who resort to the mountains to escape the moist heat of the city, but the very poorest also, join in the general exodus, to carry on their respective trades at a higher altitude, leaving the city half deserted. Amongst the most popular of these summer resorts are Brumannah, Ain Zahalta, Shemlan, Bhamdoun, and Dor Shwei.

The railway from Beyrout to Damascus was a difficult piece of engineering, the train, in some of the steeper grades, being held with a third rail. The line passes over the Lebanon, across a flat

plain, and then across the Anti-Lebanon Range to Damascus. Near the summit of Lebanon the line has to be protected by concrete shields to ward off falling snow. At some points in the Lebanons, groves of small cedar trees are still to be found. There is a famous grove of giant cedars high up near the summit of the range opposite the city of Tripoli in Syria, one specimen being about forty feet in circumference. As one listens to the wind sighing through this ancient grove, one begins to realise what a vast amount of history has occurred since these trees began nodding to each other, perhaps millenniums ago.

It is interesting to know that long before the days of refrigerators and iced drinks, the Lebanese stored snow in the mountains in rock buildings with thick walls. This snow was then kept till the summer months, and sold to cool the drinks of those living in the plains below and in the village summer resorts. After crossing the summit of the Lebanons, the road and railway line now descend in sweeping curves to the fertile plains below between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Ranges. Parts of this plain, as at Baalbec, reach an altitude of 3000 feet. To reach Baalbec the train turns north from the junction at Ryak, midway across the plain, the other line proceeding eastward and across the Anti-Lebanons, toward the ancient city of Damascus.

CHAPTER XXI

Damascus

I

FROM Ryak Junction, situated midway on the railway plateau between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Ranges, the travelling route from Beyrout divides, one branch of the road and railway passing due north through Baalbec, Homs, and Hamath, to Aleppo, the other branch continuing eastward to Damascus. Traversing the latter route we soon begin to negotiate the foothills of the Anti-Lebanons, climbing steadily upward till we cross the summit of this sparsely-wooded range. The plateau at the summit, travelling by road, is somewhat dreary, but almost without warning we begin to descend a pleasing wady leading downward to Damascus.

The change from barrenness to luxuriant fertility is almost instantaneous. Even in the heat of summer, the ear is charmed with the sound of running water and the song of birds. Picturesque villages, nestling amidst greenery, begin to appear; fruit trees abound, and the most luscious grapes droop from vines which everywhere festoon the trellis work.

But what is this running water which seems to keep pace with the traveller as he descends, mile after mile, this pleasant valley? Certainly it is a lively stream, sporting, babbling, now leaping down a cascade, or gliding through a weir or mill race, and changing what might have been a hot, barren ravine into a strip of paradise. It is none other than the ancient Abana, now called the Barada, about which Naaman the leper boasted so loudly in the days of Elisha the Prophet. Indeed, this Syrian Generalissimo suffered from pride, as well as leprosy, whereby he nearly forfeited the gratuitous favour of God by refusing to wash and be clean. Let hearers of the Gospel beware.

As we approach the environment of Damascus, we begin to come upon open-air cafes, built upon the very edge or sometimes actually over the rushing stream. Architecturally they are sometimes crude in structure, consisting, it may be, of an impromptu roof supported by posts, with awnings for shade, the whole picturesquely interlaced by vines and creepers.

Here, seated on low rush stools are crowds of men, wearing their scarlet national head-dress or tarboosh and those enormously wide pantaloons which excite the curiosity of strangers. The ideal in life for most of them is leisure in a favourite coffee-house; and their pastime seems to be that of sipping strong Turkish coffee, fingering amber beads as they laugh and converse, or playing cards. Sometimes a professional story-teller of the Arabian Nights variety completes the picture.

At night these places are ablaze with coloured electric lights, strung alluringly amongst the trees. The Syrian has a veritable mania for this out-of-doors luxury. Little wonder that the many small tables of these cafes are usually crowded to their utmost capacity, with the waiters kept continually on the run, carrying their tiny cups of coffee on trays, or opening bottles for the thirsty crowd. Though a good deal of arak, or local spirit, is imbibed, usually with a little cordial, little drunkenness is in evidence. On the whole, the Syrian is a friendly individual, manly in his bearing and in the expression of his views.

The Syrians are heavy smokers. Besides the inevitable cigarette, the narghile, or special pipe, is much in evidence in the Middle East. A live ember is placed on the bowl of tobacco, and the smoke is first drawn downward in bubbles through a glass vessel full of water, finally reaching the mouth through a long flexible tube. The narghile is usually hired from the restaurant keeper, and when the patron has finished his smoke, the pipe, with its mouthpiece usually undisinfected, is passed on to another. But singularly enough, when it comes to drinking from a water pot, no lip must ever be allowed to come into contact with the earthenware. Deftly, the vessel is poised aloft, the water squirting from a small aperture with an artistic curve, right into the open gullet of the drinker. Not a drop is spilled, nor is the swallowing motion of the drinker noticeable. No foreigner can perform this operation properly without patience and practice. If he thinks otherwise, let him try.

II

The most experienced of travellers might well be pardoned for revealing some emotion as he finds himself drawing near to one of the world's most ancient and historic cities, whose pulse, to use one of Emerson's similes, still beats like a cannon. It was from this city that the patriarch Abraham obtained his faithful servant, Eliezer. Centuries later, this self-same city many times caused

the descendants of Abraham to tremble. From the wall of the city, at a still later day, the Apostle Paul was let down in a basket in order to escape with his life.

The Arabs of the Syrian desert regard Damascus as a kind of earthly paradise. This is scarcely to be wondered at. The view, as seen from an eminence behind the city, is entrancing. Situated on the edge of the Syrian desert, it forms an oasis of pleasure, plenty, and fertility. The Barada River, as it reaches the city, appears to break up into innumerable streams; so wherever one walks in Damascus, one hears the gurgle of running water amongst the gardens of apricots, figs, oranges, and pomegranates. The great city, with its 350,000 inhabitants, lies complacently, like a white pearl set amidst a ring of emerald; for a belt of rich foliage, many miles in width, completely encircles the city. The slender shafts of palms and poplars rise gracefully from this sea of green; and never can one forget the first Damascus sunset seen from the hills which overlook the city.

Now let us take a stroll down a certain street of the city, known from Bible days as the street called Straight, and see if we can glean some information about the shopping methods of the Middle East and the characteristics of people who have as their heritage so long a background of history. One requires to keep eyes, ears, and also nose alert; for it will require more than casual observation to sort out the conglomeration of sights, sounds, and smells that thrust themselves upon the bewildered senses.

You will require to pause and watch the peculiar haggling methods of the buyers and sellers, revealing a psychology which is quite Eastern; then to seat yourself in an open restaurant and observe the passing throng, listening intently to the throbbing hubbub and babel of sounds and voices, all foreign to the ear yet conveying the spirit of the place. If you could interpret those shrill cries of the passing vendors you would hear the most flowery language used for selling the commonest and most mundane of wares. Then you might try your hand at purchasing one or two trivial articles in the suks or markets, even if you do pay more than their local value. Nor should you be afraid of sampling one or two of the native dishes, which, by the way, you can see in actual preparation; for the Damascenes know what they are about, and were probably expert in some of these culinary operations when Abraham called here on his way to Palestine, which was long before our British ancestors had left off colouring their bodies with woad.

Regarding the variety and intensity of street smells, it might console the sensitive traveller to know that smells certainly do not kill; otherwise there are places where no one would survive. But in a great commercial city like Damascus, there is some compensation in knowing that the most disagreeable smell may be immediately counteracted by the delightful odour of pure otto of roses, or some other delicate perfume. So the rather laconic writer who described a certain Oriental city as being a mixture of "yells, bells, and smells," may have been quite faithful without being maliciously disposed; for are there not interesting yells, sonorous bells and even agreeable smells?

III

It might not be out of place to issue a few words of warning to those who are tempted to buy valuable wares in Oriental cities, without knowledge of the local conditions. When, for instance, a British or American tourist pays down without bargaining, the full price asked for an article, he is probably regarded by the merchant of the East as somewhat "magnoon," that is mentally not all there—leastways so far as shopping is concerned. If you were to watch the proceedings of, say, a well-to-do buyer, seeking to buy an expensive carpet from one of these merchants, you might need several days of leisure to observe the by-play and manoeuvring. This would include much talking, coffee-drinking, hand-shaking, with much coming, going, and returning, careful comparison of prices and bed-rock propositions. If all went well, the deal might be completed on the third day at two-thirds of the original price. But let an unwily tourist leave such a scene of battle, smiling at the substantial reduction he has managed to secure, and he might afterwards find that the smile of the merchant was much broader than his own.

Bargaining is the delight of these Eastern people. A fixed price would be to them as an egg without salt. One man informed me that as most tourists seemed bent on getting rid of their money as quickly as possible, he saw no reason why he should not secure as much of it as he could, before others got it all.

A friend of mine from Australia, wandering alone in Damascus, entered the shop of an Oriental dealer and purchased an inlaid chair for the sum of eight pounds sterling. The duty paid on this article of luxury in Australia was 50 per cent, or £4, the cost of packing and freight being another £2, making £14 in all. Two years later, the same friend was walking with the writer in Jer-

usalem, when we saw in a shop an identical chair made by the same firm in Damascus. We enquired the price, and the merchant, knowing me as a resident of Jerusalem, said we could have the chair for £2. This evidently was the bedrock price, granted as a special favour because of friendship. My friend bought the chair, took it with him as personal luggage, and so escaped freight and package, and having paid the 50 per cent duty of £1, landed the chair in Melbourne for a total of £3. Thus the difference in price between these two identical chairs standing in his drawing-room was exactly £11. What made the matter slightly worse was that the buyer was a native of Aberdeen in Scotland.

On another occasion this same friend was spending a few months in Cairo, where he made the personal acquaintance of a local merchant. One day the merchant was displaying a carpet to a visiting tourist, and which he offered for the sum of £20. The tourist did not buy, and when he had left the shop my friend, who had overheard the negotiations, said playfully to the merchant:

"Fuad, I will give you twenty shillings for that rug."

The merchant chuckled at the boldness of this now sophisticated Scotsman, and not to be outdone in courage replied:

"Right, sir! You are my friend. You shall have the carpet for twenty shillings." This was obviously at a loss; so the man from Aberdeen had scored.

Sometimes a street vendor will offer you an article at a ridiculously low figure, in which case you suspect acute need, or that he has stolen the goods in question. Another peculiarity in Eastern shopping is that, if should you be the first customer of the day to enter a man's shop, he will sometimes sell you an article cheaply or even at a loss rather than forfeit the sale, which, he believes, might bring him bad luck for the day. No doubt this foolish superstition has been a boon to many an early bird.

I V

It is interesting to notice, during one's travels in the Middle East, the readiness with which some merchants will trust the word of a Britisher. A person whom you had never seen before would probably accept your cheque, even though you were only a passing tourist, or would even trust you to pay another day, if more convenient for yourself.

"Have you ever lost money in this way?" I enquired of a well-to-do merchant.

"Not from an Engleezee," he replied with a smile.

In those lands administered by Britain, British justice, too, is usually held in very high esteem.

If ever tempted to feel proud of being a member of the British Commonwealth, it is when you come upon, it may be, a pale and tired-looking British magistrate, in a thickly-crowded and sultry Court of Justice, doing his very best to mete out justice to some poor and bedraggled villager, whom he fears might be in danger of being wronged by a coterie of wealthy locals. Probably he would not sleep at night if he thought he had not dispensed justice to this most uninfluential man. At this the people wonder.

From the lips of an Armenian doctor whom I chanced to meet in the hill country behind Antioch, I heard these words:

"No! I don't think the British race will ever fall down. In the First World War I was forced to join the Turkish army fighting against the British. Being taken prisoner, I was sent out to India, then on to Burma. They were short of doctors, so I was given work to do. Being an officer, this, of course, entitled me to wages. At the end of the war, before being repatriated I filed my claim, but either through carelessness or the dishonesty of the native officials I heard nothing more about the matter. In any case I was more than thankful to arrive home safely, and thought little about the amount I had lost. Some eight years after this, I chanced one day to meet, in Syria, an Englishman, to whom I casually mentioned this matter. 'Why don't you drop a line to Whitehall, London?' he said. 'It will cost you only a trifle, and will do no harm.' I thought the suggestion rather absurd, but at his suggestion made out a statement and posted it. Some three months later, I was handed by the postman a registered letter, which I opened and read, with surprise, as follows:

"'Your letter came duly to hand, for which we thank you. Having gone into your case, we find, from our records, that you were justly entitled to an amount which you do not appear to have received. For this we are sorry, and have pleasure herewith in forwarding you this amount, plus interest.'

"No!" continued the Armenian doctor, "I don't think the British race will ever go down, when they would worry about an enemy prisoner after eight years."

Feeling very pleased I felt I could almost have added, "Yes, and if they continue to spread the Gospel, and send out Bibles, and do not join with other nations in persecuting God's ancient, but disobedient people, the Jews."

However, I trust that the sum of money, forwarded so honestly





AN AGED ARAB SHEIKH

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by the British War Office, will accomplish much more in destroying our enemies than a high explosive shell fired upon the field of battle. Heaven audits its accounts even more faithfully than the British War Office.

V

But now, as we sip for our dessert a cup of Turkish coffee, let us look a little more intently at the passing crowd in this street called Straight. We notice that the street is completely covered over, to keep out summer sun and winter rain. These covered portions are the market places, and resemble tunnels filled with animation. Crowds surge to and fro like a train of ants. Veiled women in costly black dresses finger piles of dainty red slippers made from "rams' skins dyed red," or argue over the price of dress material. Sleek well-to-do Damascenes with flowing tussore garments sit behind bales of merchandise. Opposite to where we are sitting is a money-changer. He allures trade by displaying beneath plate glass all the coins and bank-notes common to his own and the surrounding lands. In all business transactions of exchange he tries to work on the simple principle of "Heads I win, and tails you lose."

A haughty equestrian, mounted on a charger, pushes his way through the crowd. His thoroughbred Arab stallion is adorned with gorgeous trappings for the double purpose of show and for protection against the tenacious camel fly.

All manner of merchandise is displayed in the shops, which usually have no glass windows, but are shuttered and barred at night. Saddlery, antiques, footwear, drapery, silks, jewellery, seeds, fruit, groceries, sweets, and perfumes, all attract their share of buyers, and the hum and murmur of voices is continuous.

Mingling with the local people are Arabs from the desert, Fellaheen, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and a sprinkling of other Europeans. Visitors should not miss a visit to the famous gold and silver bazaars, where the most exquisite jewellery and filigree work is made before one's eyes. The metal worker of Damascus has a niche in history; for what soldier, in days when firearms had not come to the fore, would not have glorified in a "trusty Damascus blade?"

Old swords are still on sale for a small sum, some of which may be bent to form a loop without doing them damage. There is still a great amount of inlaid work done in this city, and numbers of Armenian children and others spend long hours hammering

silver and copper wire to adorn brass trays and other ornaments. Beautiful carpets, ranging in price from a few pounds to £500 are on sale, though few of these are made locally, most of them coming from Persia.

Like most Oriental cities, the lanes and by-roads of Damascus, especially in its suburban quarters, are often narrow and confusing. Houses with their windows latticed to ensure privacy sometimes almost touch each other above the streets. The practice of building above the streets is evidently to conserve space within the city.

Women walking in the streets are veiled and dressed in black, sometimes in brown. Many of them are beautiful in appearance, for the Moslems, in their wars of conquest, have taken away the picked women of other countries. Expert from Bible times in the use of cosmetics and in the art of making up, as in the case of Jezebel, Queen of Israel, a favourite custom of these women of the East is to enlarge the appearance of the eyes by the use of black paint or a burnt match. The line of the upper eyelid is continued for some distance outwards to produce the desired and realistic effect.

A noticeable characteristic of the majority of dwelling houses in this and other Eastern cities is their plain and forbidding exteriors. Beauty and comfort, if present at all, may be found only within. If, in passing down one of these narrow streets, you were to come upon a door standing ajar, you might catch a glimpse of a courtyard paved with marble, and a garden of alluring shrubs and fruit trees watered by fountains. Rooms would lead off from each side of the courtyard, some open guest rooms, others private. Everything would be strictly invisible from the outside, especially if the house were owned by Moslems. If you knocked at a closed door, it would probably not be opened; but a shrill voice would cry from within, "Meen?" which means "Who?" Or, it may be, a tiny shutter would open in the ponderous door, and a wary brown eye would survey you from safe cover. Sometimes, from the vantage of a flat roof-top you might chance to look down and see a family disporting itself—the men in one compartment smoking, conversing in animated tones over some political issue, or playing games; the ladies chatting, doing fancy-work or strumming on some stringed instrument.

I once stayed for some weeks in an old palatial residence bordering on the street called Straight. It had been inhabited by a wealthy Damascene and his wife. The courtyard, which was about sixty

feet long and fifty feet wide was paved with marble and mosaics. The panelled and painted ceilings were so rich and beautiful that American and British tourists would sometimes venture down the narrow and miserable alleyway to have a look at them. Yet outside the place had no more beauty than a barracks or a stone stable.

V I

To catch the real glamour of this ancient city, we know of no better way than to pay a visit, after nightfall, when most of the suks or markets have been closed, to a little suk leading off from the main public square. The illumination is brilliant, flooding the stalls and their contents, mostly edible, with dazzling light in contrast with other parts of the city. To watch the surging crowds with their varying costumes, to listen to the hubbub of voices and notice the varying transactions and mode of doing business is like a page from the book of the "Arabian Nights."

For those interested in antiquities, the wall of Damascus is well worth an examination. In some places the courses of stones are deeply scoured by wind-driven sand and erosion, showing their extreme antiquity. Private dwellings are built not only in close proximity to, but as actually forming part of the wall itself; so that one can easily visualise the Apostle Paul being let down by a basket from a window looking out from the city wall. Two very ancient gates still provide access to the city, though in some places the wall seems to have disappeared. These gates, known as Bab Touma (Thomas's Gate), and Bab Sharki, are definitely of Roman construction. We are pretty confident that in looking at the beautiful Roman arch of the latter gate, we are gazing upon the actual portal through which they led the temporarily-blinded Paul, who, a few hours before, had been struck down by the heavenly light, and converted from Judaism to Christianity. Passing under the arch of this gate, you enter the street called Straight, where Paul lodged, and where he was prayed for and restored from blindness by one called Ananias. Not many miles south of Damascus, the passing chauffeur of to-day pulls up his car and will point out a spring by the side of the Jerusalem-Damascus road, where this great event is supposed to have taken place.

V I I

Paul's conversion is one of the high lights of the Bible. In the instantaneous conversion of this rabid Christ-rejecter and arch-persecuter of the Christians, we have an event which, directly or

indirectly affects the welfare of the entire human family. Keyed up with expectancy as he nears the end of his six-days' journey from Jerusalem, and fortified in spirit with a warrant of arrest against the Christians of Damascus, he is already within sight of the great city when suddenly the unexpected happens. It is midday, when all life becomes still, and even the birds and animals are glad to hide themselves from the fierce glare of day. As he winds his way among the low hills of the desert, some eight miles from this Roman gateway, suddenly there flashes from the heavens a light of glory "above the brightness of the sun"; and a voice is heard, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" In one brief moment of time, Saul, the persecuter, lies prostrate, broken, and subdued. His Pharisaical pride and confidence give place to astonishment; and astonishment to amazement and remorse when, in answer to his question, "Who art thou Lord?" he receives the reply, "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest."

Who but the mighty Spirit of God could have shattered in so brief a space of time this proud oppressor, causing him to cry out, "What wilt Thou have me to do?"

The words from Heaven were deeply significant. Verily, this glorious Being Who could outshine the sun was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of the Living God; the One he would fain have imagined as dead and corrupting in some lonely grave in Jerusalem. More revealing still, with these despised Christians, whom, in his blind ignorance he had been tormenting, this heavenly Being had publicly associated Himself, in very fact, they *were Himself*. The Body on earth had been persecuted; the Head in heaven had made open protest: "Why persecutest thou Me?"

Now, led by the hand to Damascus, Saul remains for three days blind. He wants neither food nor company, but solitude, where he can weep bitter tears of remorse for the wrongs he cannot now undo. Why had this Jesus met him on his evil errand and spoken kindly instead of annihilating him in righteous judgment? After three days of dynamic struggle and heart-searching, one of the local Christians named Ananias is sent to him by the Divine Watcher. "Arise and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth."

Ananias is afraid to go, but the Lord assures him. "Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Ananias then

prays, Paul is healed of his blindness, and so thorough has been the transformation of his heart and mind that he "straightway preached Jesus." Nothing now could ever turn him from his new and divine mission in life. Ambition, self-will, worldly interests, are all cast away as dross; henceforth the motto of this master workman is, "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul's conversion was a tremendous fact in history. The dignity, frankness and complete absence of self-interest with which, at a later day, he cheerfully witnessed before kings and potentates, his burning zeal for the cause of Christ, his long and arduous journeys undertaken for the welfare of the believers, and his unparalleled sufferings place him in the foremost rank as the servant of the One Whom he once ignorantly opposed. Paul's final entry into Rome prior to his death may have seemed an event of insignificance to the brutal Nero surrounded with his earthly glory. But the effect of Paul's presence and letters on the Roman Empire, and the world in general, will never be correctly assessed till the final day of reckoning. But even now, as one writer has remarked, "Men call their dogs Nero, and their sons Paul."

Surely there is no more striking example in the Bible of the overruling principle of sovereign grace; nor yet a clearer case of the mystic yet all-important change wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of man, known as conversion or the new birth, without which there is no possible hope of salvation or the forgiveness of sins; for, are we not told by the Master Himself, in the most unequivocal language, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3. 3).

V I I I

The most outstanding building in Damascus, as far as size and history are concerned, is the Great Mosque, which stands near the Castle. It is about 430 feet long and 125 feet wide; attached to it is a huge quadrangle about 160 yards in length. There is a large dome in the centre of the mosque, supported by four massive pillars. The structure is especially interesting in that it was once a Christian church building, dedicated to John the Baptist, in the fourth century. Indeed, a large inscription in Greek may still be seen cut deeply in the stone. It reads, "Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout generations." It seems peculiar that in spite of Moslem fanaticism, with its resultant massacre of Christians at various times, this

bold inscription of the Christian faith has been allowed to remain upon the principal mosque of the city.

Another most interesting structure is the burial place of the illustrious Saladin who once ruled here, and who defeated the Crusaders so decisively in 1187. He it was who made the gentleman's truce with Richard of the Lion Heart, of England, to last for three years, three months, three weeks, etc. Treaties seemed to be respected better in those days than in our own times.

A very interesting sight in Damascus is the Haj, or annual pilgrim procession, which starts for Mecca on the fifteenth day of a certain month. On the back of one of the camels is the green silk covering known as the "muhmil," which is carried to Mecca for the purpose of draping the famous black stone called Kaabah, in the centre of the forbidden city. Thousands of Damascenes watch the pilgrims as they set out on this long and arduous journey. Pilgrims who have made this journey to Mecca are henceforth known as "Haji," and are entitled to wear a special headdress as a sign of merit.

Yet the Moslems have a somewhat ironical saying amongst themselves, that the man who has made several journeys to Mecca and Medina, the so-called holy cities associated with Mohammed, needs more careful watching by the neighbours in his street than the man who has never been on pilgrimage.

CHAPTER XXII

Baalbec, and Ur of the Chaldees

I

FROM time immemorial, Baalbec has been one of the popular summer resorts of the Middle East. Situated on a plateau between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Ranges, thousands of feet above sea level, it is indeed a pleasant habitation of babbling springs and green foliage. Excellent grapes and apricots grow here.

The ruins of Baalbec, which are amongst the most remarkable in the world, stand on an elevated platform about 1000 feet long and 600 feet wide. Running beneath the platform from end to end are well-constructed tunnels with Roman arches which might still serve a useful purpose in the event of air raids. Fallen pillars and sculptured masonry litter the platform area where once, in the days of its glory, stood three magnificent temples—the Temple of the Sun, the Temple of Bacchus, and the Temple of Venus. Even before the Roman occupation, buildings stood on these sites. Here the Romans indulged in licentious orgies, even as the names of the temples would suggest.

Of the Temple of the Sun, six Corinthian columns of colossal size still stand upon their pedestals. There are no columns in the world to rival them in height.

The Temple of Bacchus is still largely preserved. It has a magnificent peristyle of fifteen columns, still in good preservation, and a portico with beautifully-ornamented frieze and cornice. The portal of the temple, whose walls are still intact, is twenty-one feet wide and forty-two feet high, and is regarded as a masterpiece of creative art.

The Temple of Venus is small but elegant, and is also almost intact. It is circular in shape, with beautiful niches and wreaths hanging gracefully from the sculptured cornice.

But it is the building stones found *in situ*, in the western wall of the platform, which most excite the wonder of masons and architects. The measurements of the three largest, known as the "Trilithon," are 64 feet, 63 feet, and 63 feet in length, 13 feet in height, and about the same in width. There is one bigger stone, still undetached, in the quarry some distance away, which is 64

feet by $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and is computed to weigh about 1100 tons. Immovable by any present-day machinery, the ancients were able to transport and utilize these stones in building.

These facts, coupled with the knowledge of past history and literature, together with the present-day archæological discoveries, raise some interesting queries as to the mental status and ability of the earlier generations of the human race. Granted that there is a steadily-mounting sum total of human knowledge, due to the investigation and experience of past generations, have we any proof that the brain capacity of the race is greater now than it was in the beginning? Is it not possible that the moral degeneracy prophesied so graphically as taking place in the last days of the dispensation (see for instance 2 Tim. 3. 1-5), and even now verified in the truce-breaking diplomacy and inordinate love for pleasure as manifested in the world to-day, may be largely due to the lack of health and vigour in the mentality of the masses? Be this as it may, scientists are being confronted with some very startling evidence being dug up from many different fields in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Crete, and especially in Iraq, the ancient Mesopotamia.

Take as an illustration the fascinating discoveries made at Ur of the Chaldees, by Sir Leonard Woolley, working on behalf of the British Museum.

II

In the light of these findings many thoughtful men are being compelled to alter their opinions concerning man's history on the earth. Thus it is found, for instance, that Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, was not, as many have supposed, an ignorant and illiterate Bedouin wanderer, but hailed from a royal city possessing a high state of civilisation. Thousands of tablets and other objects dug up from the period of this patriarch, some of them actually dated, have given fresh light on these days. The cuneiform clay tablets continually being unearthed can now be read with ease. Business transactions on the part-payment system, receipts, deeds, corrected essays of college students, schoolboys appealing to their parents for more pocket-money before the end of the term, etc., are now coming to hand in ever-increasing numbers, for those who would make themselves familiar with the everyday life of these ancients. In Abraham's day students worked at mathematics much as they do now. The heavens had been mapped out, boys were tackling problems involving the use of square and even cube root, reminding us that present-day knowledge is largely a free legacy of the distant past.

Again, when one examines such exquisite workmanship as, say, the tempered gold mask helmet of King Mes-kalam-dug, dug up from the death-pits of Ur, and made centuries before Abraham lived; or when one looks upon the harp of Queen Shub, with its delicately modelled bull's head of gold, fashioned by workmen who lived soon after the flood, one sees workmanship which could scarcely be excelled in beauty at the present time, despite the vast improvement in tools and machinery. The delicate secrets of metallurgy, such as the hardening of bronze, and even gold, common in the days of the patriarchs, is now a lost art, and we think of the poem learned in school days,

*"Old Tubal Cain was a man of might
In the days when earth was young."*

How glibly men speak of a "stone age" as being a definite boundary line in the evolution of man upon the earth. But we might do well to remember that the Maoris of New Zealand, for instance, who were using stone implements one hundred years ago, were most probably using highest quality metals before they left their mainland thousands of years previously. Man has to cut his cloth according to the materials on hand. A party of Londoners or New Yorkers cast ashore on some lonely island to-day would probably be classed as stone age men to-morrow. Seaweed or bark for clothing, flints for axes, and shell fish for diet would be the recognized order of the day for those who may have recently been dining in evening dress at the Savoy, London.

When one pauses to think of the galaxy of poets, philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, orators, dictators, and military leaders, who lived in days B.C., surely we see, or should see, that we are not the only pebbles on the beach. Our arts and sciences have their roots in the ancient world. The world-dictators of to-day are miserable failures compared with men like Rameses II, Nebuchadnezzar, or Alexander the Great. As for architecture, the average town of the present would be a slum in comparison with the luxury and grandeur of these ancient kingdoms. What the Greeks did not know about oratory, sculpture, physical culture, and communal laws, has still to be found out. The Psalms of David, the majestic stanzas of the Prophet Isaiah, and the writings of the New Testament are, in their appeal to the human heart, surely beyond comparison.

III

In travelling across the alluvial and level expanse between the

Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, one sometimes notices on the horizon long low mounds, rising, it may be, some sixty feet above the level of the plain. To the archæologist these mounds may prove El Dorados of discovery. Running a trial cut through one of these mounds the digger may be confronted with a succession of layers of past civilisations, each yielding evidence far more trustworthy than the mere theories and speculations of this or that school of thought. Here we have concrete evidence of the past, honest and unfaked, so much "tinned" history, so to speak.

In this sixty feet we may examine, at leisure, man's efforts from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to man's beginnings on the earth away back before the Flood. For as fast as one level of habitation had been ruined by war, fire, or earthquake, another layer had been superimposed upon it. To make the evidence doubly sure, most of the stratas, including those well below Abraham's period, and almost down to the Flood silt, have, fortunately, buildings with clearly-written foundation stones. For instance, the great Ziggurat of Ur, built with such scientific precision, was built, according to the detailed inscription which it bears, several centuries before Abraham lived; so that this is one of the buildings the patriarch would see daily during his early days at Ur.

Another interesting discovery made first at Ur, and later verified by other excavators at other mounds, was the eight-foot layer of fresh-water silt (devoid of shells), separating the upper layers of civilisation from those two or three stratas resting upon the virgin soil of the original plain. There is not an accredited archæologist who does not refer to this as "the Flood silt."

To corroborate this diagnosis, inscriptions are frequently being unearthed and which make direct reference to the great water cataclysm referred to by the patriarchs, the Apostles, and by the Lord Himself. Thus, when a tablet has been cleaned and deciphered, it may read, "God restored the kingship after the flood," or, "These are the kings who reigned after the flood."

Not far from Babylon are the interesting ruins of Kish, one of earth's earliest cities. Picking up a large brick with a curved upper surface, common to that period immediately following on the Flood silt, I noticed in one corner the deep thumb-print of a man, probably of the one who had moulded the brick. It was the thumb mark of a giant, in comparison with which my own thumb was like a pygmy's. It seemed to vindicate the words of Genesis 6. 3: "There were giants in the earth in those days."

IV

This gives us food for thought. How many high-school teachers, for instance, may one day have cause to regret the serious damage which their chilling doubts and gentle shafts of ridicule, aimed, perhaps thoughtlessly, at these majestic Bible narratives, have wrought in the minds of the students entrusted to their care? The Lord Jesus had some very hard words to say about those who "offend one of these little ones," which it is well to consider. Also how many calling themselves theologians and shepherds of the sheep, have succeeded only in scattering their flocks, through following at the heels of pseudo-scientists, instead of preaching the pure and infallible Word of God?

Our Lord said on one occasion, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall never pass away"; and again, "The Scripture cannot be broken." The grand plan of Scripture as a whole is to present the truth of Redemption; and part from the fall of man, as given in the Book of Genesis, and opposed by the theory of Evolution, the preaching of the Gospel as set forth by the Apostles, would be fatuous folly. But the very stones of Lachish, Jericho, Mizpah, Ras Shamra, Nineveh, Ur, Kish, and a great many other places are crying out vehemently against the false teachers who have led seeking souls into the wilderness, there to perish with hunger, when they might have been satisfied with the "finest of the wheat."

It has been the privilege of the writer to have visited most of these famous archæological sites of the Middle East, and to have talked with celebrated archæologists, none of whom seems to have the slightest inclination to quarrel either with the veracity or the accuracy of detail of the Scriptures. For them the Old Testament is their principal guide-book in research. Also those great men who have passed from the scene, men such as Sayce, Rawlinson, Botta, Petrie, and Starkey, found the Bible amazingly accurate in its minutest details. But the same could never be said of pagan records whose history is based largely on mythology; where victories are grossly exaggerated, defeats minimized or suppressed, and facts and fables mingled. The Old Testament is largely a sober record of facts. The inspired prophets of the Bible who could weep for their nation before God, nevertheless placed on record, for all time, the humiliating details of their people's failure and wrong-doing as well as their magnificent triumphs through the goodness of God.

Again, how often have we heard it said that man, in the process

of evolution, has been struggling onwards, from the darkness of pantheism, or gods many, to the worship of the one true God. Archæology shows the very opposite to be true. From the gods legion of Egypt, the further we travel back through ancient Babylonish history to the Sumerians and the Flood, the fewer the gods become. Even in the days of the Sumerians, worship was confined largely to the Sun God and the Moon God, but further back still to the God of Heaven. This agrees with Bible history.

It is interesting to note that both the Bible and Archæology point to the Euphrates Valley as being the cradle of the human race. It seems only reasonable to believe that the first man and woman who walked in innocence and communion with their Creator, in His likeness, as the head and crown of a beautiful creation, must themselves have been the very embodiment of beauty and perfection. Millenniums of sinful dissipation, wrong thinking, disease, and sorrow, could never have improved the mental calibre or the physical stamina of mankind.

The Bible claims that man's history on this earth has been a very short and unhappy one. It goes so far as to trace the pedigree of Christ, from the aspect of His humanity, back to the first man, Adam. Archæology has taken us already very far along this road; and to-day we may stand upon the plains of Iraq amongst the ruins uncovered below the Flood silt, and see the plumbing efforts of men, draining waste water from their wives' kitchens, when Adam had been in his grave but a very short time.

V

Some years ago, while visiting the British Museum, I noticed that a lecture was to be delivered in that institution upon a subject which was of special interest to one living in the Middle East. The topic was about man's efforts and civilisations from the distant past up till the present day. An international crowd, armed with pencils and note-books, assembled early one afternoon to listen to the learned lecturer.

Warning us that we must be prepared for a good deal of walking during the course of the address, we all tramped away to the Ur of the Chaldees Room, where we were confronted with tier upon tier of relics recovered from that ancient city. Pointing to some of these the lecturer began: "Ladies and gentlemen, the objects on these particular shelves have all been recovered from below the Flood silt at Ur."

One German lady in the party, thoroughly versed, no doubt,

in the theories of Evolution and Modernism, seemed almost to drop her note-book in sheer surprise. Here was a lecturer who had, at the very outset, yielded two points in favour of the Bible. He had commenced his address by taking us back to the banks of the Euphrates, which river, according to the Bible narrative, flowed from the garden home of our first ancestors. Also, he had referred to the great cataclysm which had come upon the earth directly as the result of the gross wickedness of a fallen humanity.

The lecturer continued his fascinating address as we progressed from room to room, making repeated references to leading Bible characters such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the most familiar manner.

"I notice, sir," said one of the party, "that you make many references to the Bible in the course of your address."

"And why not?" replied the lecturer. "What better authority have I than the Scriptures?"

Another lady asked the lecturer why he had made no reference to those races who had lived hundreds of thousands of years ago.

"Madam!" he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "I have been dealing with evidence such as we have on hand in the British Museum."

CHAPTER XXIII

Petra

I

UNTIL recent years Petra was, for travellers, the mystery packet of the Middle East. In days of the Turkish regime, a visit to Petra was about as risky as climbing Mount Everest. Now, thanks to the speed of the motor car, and the excellent patrol system at present functioning in Transjordan under the watchful eye of a British administrator, a visit to Petra is quite a feasible proposition.

Of all the ruined cities of the past, Petra stands unique in that, though absolutely dead, its buildings still persist. Lifeless as the rock from which it has been hewn, it is, outwardly, as imperishable.

In Old Testament times Petra was known as Mount Seir, sometimes as Sela. The names "Petra," and "Sela," both mean "rock"; and in this rocky fortress, the sons of Edom, through the line of Esau, dwelt secure for centuries (Gen. 36). Edom means "red." Whether this name is taken from the colour of the rock formation of Mount Seir, or whether it has some subtle reference to the patriarch Esau or his mess of pottage, cannot be certified.

Petra, the one-time capital of Idumea, lies in the bosom of a wild and rugged chain of mountains reaching from the Gulf of Akaba on the Red Sea to the southern shores of the Dead Sea. It is about midway between the two seas. In later times Petra was subject to the Jewish kings, then passed under the sway of the Nabateans. But it was not till Roman times that the city attained its highest pinnacle of prosperity. It later became a kind of international strong-room for safeguarding the costly treasures of caravans passing between Iraq, Arabia, and Egypt, via the Sinai Peninsula.

Leaving by car well before sunrise we had travelled hard all day due south from Aman (ancient Rabbah), the capital of Transjordan, the city which was subdued by Joab while David tarried in Jerusalem and got himself into serious trouble.

Traversing the high tableland of Moab along the eastern side of the Dead Sea, we passed Mount Nebo, ancient Madeba, and later in the day, the River Arnon, which empties into the Dead Sea.

As the long day wore on, we drew far south of the lake, and drew nearer and nearer the regions of Kadesh-Barnea as we skirted the Wilderness of Sin. Passing Maan, we arrived about sunset at the head of the famous Wady Mousa, and leaving the car, mounted the mules and horses awaiting us, to complete the journey to Petra, if possible before nightfall.

I I

The first glimpse of the heights around Petra remains indelibly impressed upon the memory. The weird and unearthly pinkness of Petra mountain was strangely augmented by the glory of the setting sun. Sharp pinnacles of rock stood out against the burnished skyline like the teeth of a gigantic saw, giving the impression of a celestial landscape or a Jules Verne setting of another world. It was, in sober fact, the most unearthly scene one had ever gazed upon.

Rapidly closing in width, the valley of Wady Mousa soon became a narrow defile, forming the chief approach to the ancient city. Before entering the defile we had passed numbers of trogladite dwellings, imperishable human habitations hewn from huge boulders or from the face of the rock. Though antique and untenanted, they were, none the less, the most up-to-date abodes on the whole planet, being bomb-proof while yet on the surface level.

No city ever had such an approach as Petra. For two whole miles or so, we traversed, in single file, the winding water-channel of Ain Mousa, or Spring of Moses. Sometimes we seemed to be travelling through a subterranean passage, so narrow was this rocky rift. At other times we could see the sky, almost shut out by perpendicular or overhanging walls of rock, from one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet high.

Our little party of six had now been increased by two armed escorts, a guide, and a few water-carriers, and others. It seemed hard to realise, as we rode expectantly onward between these two winding rocky walls that we were traversing what had once been the regular approach to a great metropolis.

A sudden bend in the defile brings us, without warning, face to face with a rock-hewn edifice of entrancing beauty and exquisite design, than which there is no better specimen in the whole of Petra. The beautiful facade of this structure, which is known as the Khaznet, is richly adorned with majestic Corinthian columns and an entablature which is considered by all a superlative work of

art. The interior of the Khaznet, however, is devoid of any embellishments, and consists of one lofty room and several smaller ones leading from it. One of the columns of the facade is missing. The rocky face from which the edifice has been hewn is itself beautified with coloured stratas natural to the place, and on either side of the facade one can see the notches cut in the rock to support the scaffolding as the workmen worked from the top of the structure downwards.

The defile through which we have just passed now broadens out into a wide valley resembling a crater, walled in by huge precipices, with smaller valleys leading this way and that. From the existing remains we can see that this valley and also the defile itself was once paved uniformly with square stones, the removal of which and the action of the sometimes flooded stream has greatly detracted, no doubt, from the original order and beauty of the city. In the fading twilight we could just distinguish numerous excavations at the bases of all the cliffs and high up in the cliffs themselves.

Our first care, after a hasty glance around was to prepare a suitable camping place for the party. The guide decided on a grotto at the base of one of the cliffs, and we soon had our camp-cots arranged and an improvised table spread for the evening meal. Meanwhile the camp followers had collected a large pile of sticks and brushwood for the camp-fire, which was to be kept burning all night. By the time we all sat down to eat our well-earned meal prepared for us by the dragoman, darkness had descended upon the scene. One by one the members of the party fell asleep, while the guards kept watch in turn. By ten o'clock stillness had descended on the camp, and as the camp-fire cast its fitful gleams into the surrounding darkness, it revealed caves and cliffs and ancient abodes of men.

III

It was a novel sensation to be breakfasting amidst the ruins of a great city whose soul had departed. A few Bedouin, attracted by our camp-fire, descended to the ruins to search amongst the debris for souvenirs. They were about the most degraded people we had seen in the Middle East, and not at all like the proud Bedouin usually encountered. Dirt peeled in flakes from the necks and faces of the children, who looked as though they had never seen soap and water.

Presently a Bedouin approached us with a find. It was an ancient earthenware lamp. We would gladly have purchased the

article, but the engraving upon it was so disgustingly obscene in character, that we marvelled at the degradation of the one who made it. Here, then, was a straw showing which way the wind had blown, as regards immorality, in the ancient city of Petra. Let no one imagine for a moment that all religions of the world have the right to claim equality with the faith of Christianity. Let those who think so get down to bedrock in India, Egypt, or the classical world and see for themselves that Christianity and man's natural religion are as far apart as night and day.

A glance round the ruins of Petra shows that it must have been an artistic and orderly city. In some places the cliffs, from base to summit, seem to have been excavated in such a way as to appear, in the words of another, "a fantastic medley of grandeur and commonplace, unparalleled in any country, yet a testimony of the importance and vitality of this one-time capital of Edom." In some places tombs, niches, and private houses cut in the rock seem inexplicably mixed together, and the cosmopolitan nature of the architecture is an indication of the different people who once dwelt in this international caravansary.

It is not easy to visit all the ruins of Petra. Valleys lead off from the crater-like central depression which forms the principal part of the city. Strange new objects of interest meet the eye around every bend in these valleys. One valley leads upward to the gigantic El Deir. This excavation which was evidently used as a temple, is 150 feet high, and equally wide. The front is ornamented by relief columns cut from the rock. The immense size of the edifice may be judged at a distance by the relative size of persons standing in the doorway.

Opposite to El Deir, looking in the direction of the Sinai Wilderness, is the celebrated Mount Hor, lonely burial place of Aaron, the brother of Moses. It is the highest peak of Mount Seir range, being 4580 feet high.

Among the many interesting objects of ancient Petra is the rock-hewn Greek theatre. It has 38 rows of semi-circular ledges for seating accommodation, the back row being about 450 feet long, and the lowest, of course, much shorter in diameter.

No visit to these ruins would be complete without making the somewhat hazardous ascent to see the place of Sacrifice on one of the highest summits. It is in a perfect state of preservation, with no defacement of any kind. Here Baal was worshipped with the most licentious rites, carried out usually by moonlight. Carved in the summit of the rock is an altar, a courtyard with channels

cut to carry away the blood, and other necessary accessories. The altar commands an extensive view, and the smoke rising from it would be visible for miles around. Here, then, is a graphic witness of the past—but what a past!

Lord Hamilton, describing a visit to Petra, writes as follows:

"Following a path which wound amongst undulating hills and rocks, we gradually found ourselves surrounded by the peculiar remains of this singular locality. On both sides were curiously shaped tombs, either excavated from the living rock, with fanciful exteriors, or boldly cut out from it, and standing apart in square masses, and surmounted with battlements, steps, small pyramidal forms, and other devices, equally hewn out from the mountain. Many of these excavations may have been intended for the living, as they contain several apartments.

"On the left, the abrupt cliffs rise to a great height, and towering over the undulated site of the ancient capital, exhibit, on their pierced sides, numerous marks of the industry and peculiar taste of the inhabitants of Sela.

"To the right another loftier range of precipitous hills hem in the valley, and present a continued line of splendid facades, and noble excavated temples and palaces, which at once strike the beholder as the most extraordinary sight the imagination can conceive. Nothing can exceed the singularity of the general aspect; nor do the excavations lose any of their marvels on a nearer approach.

"It is impossible by any description to convey an idea of the general aspect of this most extraordinary place, where art and nature seem to have striven for the mastery, and each has contributed to render it alike the most wonderful and instructive sight that can possibly be surveyed by man."

It is true, however, that Petra does not appeal to all in the same way. Those who have a good knowledge of architectural designs and technique, and know how easily a structure may be fatally marred by faulty sculptors, would appreciate more than others this extraordinary city. For my own part, it was the distant approach to this "Rose-red city, half as old as time," that fixed itself vividly in my memory. The "rose-red" of this hackneyed quotation refers, of course, to the reddish colour of the surroundings. In some places, the red, white, blue, and black stratas in the rock form in themselves a picture well worth seeing.

The second night we spent in Petra, I lay awake in the darkness

thinking over the many sights of the day. Again our blazing camp-fire lit up the base of the enormous cliff under which we were camped. The stars looked down on ancient Sela as they had done for millenniums past. No sound disturbed the profound stillness, save the occasional cry of some lonely jackal or the low murmuring of the guards. Our little party was in sole possession of this deserted capital of the Edomites—a city without people. For what reason had the place been brought to utter desolation? One thought of other ruins one had looked upon—Pompeii, Babylon, Nineveh, and Noph. Could it be any other than the overruling hand of God that had brought these things to pass? What was the reason for it all? Perhaps the little earthenware lamp with the obscene picture had given the perfect clue. "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." No doubt God's hand had fallen in judgment upon the city, according to the forewarnings of the prophets; and so its life had passed away. To quote the words of another: "Gone were the crowds; the thunderous applause for the returning victors no longer echoed amongst the hill-tops; no gorgeous pageantry ascended to the altar of Baal; the seats of the theatre were bare and empty, where once was life and beauty; temples, palaces, dwellings, and tombs were desecrated and despoiled." God had spoken, and it was done.

I V

It might be interesting to quote a few of the prophecies uttered in warning at a time when as yet Petra was still in her pride and power. These show clearly that God sees the end from the beginning, and makes the Bible unique among all the books of the world.

"I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate" (Ezek. 35. 3). "Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord. Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished" (Jer. 49. 16, 17). "I laid his (Esau's) heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness" (Mal. 1. 3). "It is an habitation of dragons" (Isa. 34. 13).

That night we were silent witnesses that these prophecies had been carried out to the very letter, proving the words of our Lord: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24. 35).

V

Had we remained many more days at Petra, it seems as though a small community might have again been organised in this ancient capital. With the two gendarmes as a standing army, and the increasing camp-followers as subjects of the realm, there is no knowing how we might have got along. What we do know is that when we passed up Wady Mousa we were a formidable company of horsemen, guards, water-carriers, guides, camp-followers, juveniles, plus our own party of six, including two ladies. From whence had the crowd come? It seemed to be increasing every moment. The explanation was simple. The poor inhabitants of this isolated region have been taught by the authorities of Transjordan that it is better to extract a little backsheesh from a number of visitors, in a lawful way, than to make a bigger haul at rare intervals by robbing a traveller outright. In other words, it is better policy to encourage the tourist and "squeeze" him lawfully, rather than to scare away travellers by robbing them outright. So all seemed cheery, helpful, and expectant. No doubt it was the unusual generosity of one of the members of our party, a prominent business man from Auckland, New Zealand, who, with his wife, was visiting the Middle East, which had increased both the size and the goodwill of this company of camp-followers.

It speaks well for the care and watchfulness of the Transjordan police when we mention that each time we passed a lonely police outpost on our long journey homeward, news was transmitted by wire to the next station, telling when we had passed, and about the time we should be due to arrive at the next post. Had we been overdue, enquiries would have been made immediately. I have since been told that, could the innocent traveller but know how often he is being scanned from the most unlikely-looking places, by invisible batteries of Bedouin eyes, he would be more likely to appreciate the good offices performed gratuitously by the local police to ensure his safety.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Fig Tree

I

NINETEEN centuries of dreary winter have slowly spent themselves; but the gnarled old fig tree, storm-threshed, leafless, and bare has life in him yet.

Again will he strike his roots deeper, and spread his branches upward, and flourish in the summer sun. Again he will be clothed with luxuriant growth, and will yield the rich harvest of his choicest fruits.

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh." (Matt. 24. 32).

These words were spoken by the Lord Himself as He sat one day on Olivet, and the three points we wish to notice are: There is a summer coming for this world. Human beings on earth will witness the approach of this summer. Immediately preceding its coming, the fig tree, relating to Palestine and the Jewish nation, will begin to put on its leaves. What particularly interests us is that of the sixty-three odd generations which have come and gone since these prophetic words were spoken, we, of this generation, standing on this same Mount of Olives may lift up our eyes and see the fig tree putting forth his leaves.

When, as the result of the First World War, the tiny land of Palestine was delivered from the Turks by the Allies, this might have appeared a very insignificant event in world history. But from the Divine point of view it was not so.

Since 1922 Britain has remained in official control of Palestine under the powers vested in the Mandate issued by the League of Nations. The first High Commissioner, appointed when the land was handed over from military to civil control, was Sir Herbert Samuel, a Jew. His successors have all been British by nationality. Sir Herbert, with an executive mostly British, but with a few Jews and Arabs, immediately settled down in earnest to bring about a revival in the land. Road communication was one of the first things attended to. The old Turkish roads were greatly improved. Modern military highways were taken in hand. Highway robbers,

who made night travel especially dangerous were put down; hundreds of miles of main roads and the same of by-roads, opening up villages and colonies, were surveyed and worked upon. The revenue from taxation, being methodically collected and wisely and honestly expended, the whole country, imbued with new confidence, began to make rapid progress.

With the prospect of safe and settled government, the tiny stream of Jewish immigration (which encouraged by the colonial schemes of Moses Montifiore and Baron Rothschild, began to flow Zionwards under the Turkish regime), now swelled into a roaring torrent. It became immediately necessary to regulate this tide of immigration in such a manner that not more might be admitted into the country than could be dealt with by a government having only young and limited resources. For this the government received much criticism from the heads of the Zionist movement, who appeared quite willing and able to carry on their own shoulders the whole burden of the immigration scheme.

When the armistice of the First World War was signed, there were approximately fifty-five thousand Jews living in Palestine. To-day, despite the restricted immigration, there is well over half a million settled in the land. Still, the Jewish population is greatly exceeded by the Moslems, not counting the Christians, who number between seventy and eighty thousand. The majority of Palestine's population is on the land, though the rapid growth of such cities as Tel Aviv, Haifa, and New Jerusalem, must be quickly altering the ratio between town and country dwellers.

Another duty of the new administration was to remedy that displeasing feature of Palestine so noticeable to strangers, the comparative scantiness of trees both on the plains and also in the hill country. This defect had been caused by the ceaseless process of deforestation in Turkish times, and by an ancient tax levied on all fruit and olive trees. Loans were arranged with the European banks for the purpose of afforestation. The effect can be seen to-day on every hand. Millions of seedlings have been raised and planted out on hill and plain.

II

One of the greatest features of modern Palestine is the rise and growth of the Jewish colonies, of which there are about one hundred and seventy in the land. Some of these are in their infancy; others, planted on the Plain of Sharon under the Turkish regime, are grown up and self-contained. The older colonies,

such as Petah-Tikva, Rishon-le-Zion, and Zicron-Jacob, were founded in the seventies and eighties of last century, and have established industries, such as wine producing and the raising of pedigree stock. The colonies are well distributed throughout the land, and include the level plains and the hill country.

Besides these established colonies on the great maritime plains of Gaza, Sharon and Acre, there are some in the Shepelah or foothills, adjoining the plain, where, in Bible days, the Jews and Philistines played continuous hide-and-seek. Others again are found on the rocky back-bone traversing the country from North to South, these being mostly in the vicinity of Jerusalem. A few have been planted in the Jordan Valley, mostly in Galilee.

But the most wonderful transformation has taken place on the great plain of Esdraelon. A few years ago, Esdraelon was a scene of desolation. To-day it has twenty or more villages, large areas under cultivation, with roads and state schools. Its treacherous malarial marshes have been drained, and a thousand acres planted in forest.

In place of a few wandering Arab shepherds, you see everywhere light-hearted, youthful, educated Jewish colonists, fired with the one ambition of restoring their national home, and making their particular colony a success. These colonists have the appearance of being very much alert in adopting improvements, and linking science with labour.

In some instances, the fight to ensure success has been a hard one. Each colony has its independent system of community life. Some of the colonies encourage private ownership; others, taking their cue from Bolshevism, have gone to the other extreme, and have everything in common, including even home life. Others, again, seem to steer a middle course, and have community interests in machinery and implements, while retaining much of their individualism.

The methods of profit sharing and land purchase vary considerably; also the methods of farming, owing to the local conditions, differ considerably. It is indeed interesting in this land of Palestine, where the local Arabs live and farm as far as can be seen, exactly as they did in Bible days, to see tractors tearing up the soil on the great plain of Esdraelon, where for thousands of years the surface has been merely tickled by primitive wooden ploughs.

So far, no Jews seem to have been able to penetrate to the districts beyond Jordan. Were they granted permission to colonise the arable stretches of the great Moabite plateau, or the hills

of Gilead, or those great plains of Bashan on the north, wonderful results might take place. The area of the land bequeathed to Abraham and his heirs by Divine decree, and which will be returned to the Jews in a coming day, was many times that of the present-day Palestine. It reached from the Gulf of Akbar, right up to Hamath in Syria, and from there to the Euphrates River. One can imagine something of what will take place when this great area is thoroughly irrigated and cultivated, and God restores again the blessing and the moisture which, in His anger, He took away.

III

Amongst the most striking evidences of the revival of Palestine is the phenomenal growth of the town colonies.

At Tel Aviv, near the ancient port of Jaffa, a city has literally sprung into existence. What a few years ago was a village of a few houses, built upon the sandy seashore, is now a flourishing and up-to-date city of about 170,000 inhabitants. Splendidly-built houses in the most modern style, parks, and well-laid out gardens, sea-kiosks, to accommodate the thousands of bathers, factories, and industries involving millions of capital, are the order of the day. The whole city throbs with new life. After sunset, on the Sabbath, thousands of people parade the streets, most of them speaking in the language of David.

A landing pier and harbour have been begun, and the neighbouring city of Jaffa, which before the Arabic-Jewish riots was a booming city, has, by the withdrawal of Jewish capital and shipping, been left lamenting.

Some miles north of Jaffa, and sheltering in the Bay of Acre, is the promising town of Haifa. What was, in the Turkish days, a peaceful little village and German colony, is now a bustling seaport, which may one day be the terminus of a great railway coming through from Mesopotamia, and deflected to the south to avoid French Syria, with its terrible grades across the Lebanons. The Jews have already been experimenting in shipping, and may one day own their own lines.

The colonies at Jerusalem and its vicinity vary somewhat from those already referred to. The ancient city, with its solid masonry, its narrow, arched thoroughfares, and its historic walls, does not lend itself to the process of modernisation. But a place so rich in historic memories as Jerusalem, must exercise a fascination over the Jew. And so it is the environment of the city that is undergoing transformation. Day by day the booming of explosives tells of

rocks being blown away to make room for new building sites, new streets, new gardens outside the walls of Old Jerusalem. It is amazing what industry, coupled with sentimental patriotism, can accomplish on this rocky plateau of Judea, turning waste places into gardens and terraces of surpassing beauty and fertility.

Enough, perhaps, has been written to give those interested in the fulfilment of the prophetic words of Scripture an idea of what is taking place in this most interesting of lands, in whose cities the language of David is again heard. The rock bottom of all this extraordinary enterprise in Palestine may be said to be prophecy; and Palestine, be it remembered, is the world's alarm clock. The Jews believe their prophets, or at least what they have spoken concerning the restoration of Israel as a nation.

We are living in momentous days. Palestine is surely putting on her leaves. But leaves are not fruit, and the approach of summer is not summer; for there can be no fruit in Israel in the truest sense of the word, either nationally or individually, without Christ; neither can there be summer till the terrible misrule of the nations has been replaced by the Lord's reign of righteousness and love.

In spite of all the happenings of the past and present, the Jewish mind is still unrepentant, still blinded towards the Saviour of the world. This national blindness and prejudice nothing but the terrible woes of the Tribulation will ever effectually overcome. None the less we see many interesting signs which bespeak at least the changing of the seasons.

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Zionism and The Mandate

I

THE phenomenal changes which have taken place in Palestine since the conclusion of the First Great War up till the present time may be attributed, from a human standpoint at least, to the rapid influx of Jewish immigrants and Jewish capital, and to the constructive enthusiasm of the Zionist movement. This has been assisted in some degree by the colonial experience and steady administration of British officials, and the general goodwill of the British Empire.

Stated briefly, the problem of Zionism and the Mandate has been how best to change a backward and conservative Moslem country into a flourishing and modern "Eretz Israel," or Land of Israel, which would be the ethical and spiritual centre for world-wide Jewry, with the Jews in the dominant majority.

Whatever may have been in the minds of Zionist idealists, profound statesmen, or students of prophecy, it seems manifest that when, in 1922, Great Britain assumed the Mandate of Palestine, and set out, with the aid of Zionism, to provide a National Home for the Jews, the average man, whether Jew or Gentile, and the average official had very little conception of the greatness, the historical importance or the difficulty of the task.

That such a task had to be attempted in the face of a deeply-prejudiced Arabic majority, with national feeling fanned at times into an open blaze, quite accounts for the years of internal strife and bloodshed between the races, leading at times to open rebellion on the part of the Arabs and armed intervention on the part of the authorities.

Though, amongst themselves, the Arabic leaders proved to be weak and divided as to their general policy, their unanimous resistance to the carrying out of the Balfour Declaration was spirited and unyielding. This resistance seemed, all along, to be buttressed by a superiority complex attitude, as being the rightful owners of the country, and the proud and faithful followers of the Prophet of Islam. To make matters still more difficult, any political hesitation on the part of Britain to enforce the Balfour Declaration, to

which she, and other of the allied nations had definitely given their signatures, had the double effect of at once arousing the world-wide indignation of Jewry, and encouraging and stiffening the claims and opposition of Moslem leaders in Palestine and the surrounding Moslem countries.

II

It was never the policy of the more enthusiastic Zionists to rely on mere steady advancement, with the usual passage of time, to bring about their designs, and to heal acute national differences. To risk a crisis, and to enforce decisively the principles of the Declaration was the only policy which could satisfy a newly-emancipated people, fired with a vision of a new and glorious Israel, rising, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the past.

So, for weal or woe, amidst the vacillations of governments, Royal Commissions, schemes for settlement on the one hand, and discontent, strikes, assassinations, bombs, bullets, and the rushing about of armoured cars, on the other, the stream of Jewish immigration, sometimes as a trickle, sometimes as a flood, has flowed ever onwards. Neither bribes of land offered in other parts of the British Commonwealth of nations, nor the threats of extermination from the present owners of the land has materially diminished the tide of immigration.

Even the most rabid opponents of the Jews could scarcely formulate the charge that the Jews were returning to Palestine to exploit the Arabs and make money. They brought back millions of capital to a country already impoverished by Turkish rule; with hills denuded of soil through centuries of neglect, and plains devastated by wandering goats and blistered by want of water.

The Jewish pioneers came back prepared to drain malarial swamps, to wheel soil in barrows from the valleys up the hill-sides, to build colonies in the midst of bitter enemies, to fertilize the soil if necessary, as they themselves said, with their own dead bodies. In the face of such enthusiasm, opposition was useless. They were coming back to Palestine, to the land of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. They were returning to possess the soil they had prayed for, as a nation, for nearly two millenniums, during their weary exile. The swallows were returning to their nests. Completely obsessed with their own idealism, they seemed totally blind to the Arab viewpoint, just as the Arab was to theirs. Yet both nations were of the same stock, both claiming direct descent from Abraham.

To the Arab, it seemed ridiculous that Britain should generously compensate her allies of the First Great War by settling them on Arabic land in Palestine.

To the Jew it seemed equally absurd that such a small portion of Britain's vast conquests could not be set aside, not as a Jewish possession, but as a National Home where Jews might at least reside in peace to work out their own destiny and culture, meanwhile respecting in every way the rights of their Arab neighbours in the land.

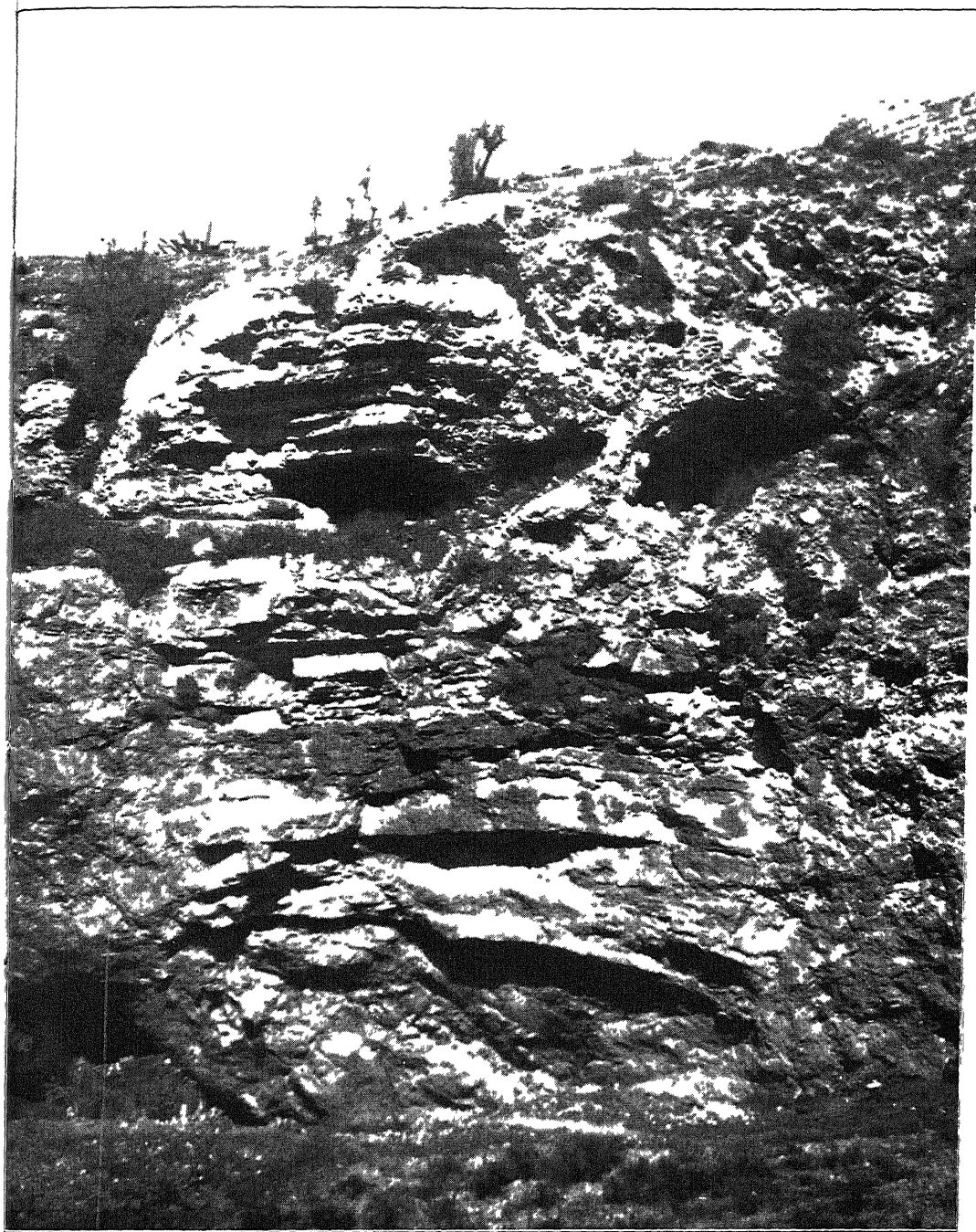
To the British Government, which had spent millions in the conquest of Palestine from the Turks, and had lost thousands of sons in hard-won battles, what could be more becoming, after giving independence to millions of Moslems in the surrounding territories, than to reserve one little piece of land "west of Damascus," as the Anglo-Arabic agreement had specified, somewhat vaguely, where persecuted Jews might be allowed to settle in their ancient home and work out their own destinies.

III

Meanwhile the squabbles in Palestine were by no means unnoticed by those ambitious and hungry European powers who were scheming for world dominion and the final overthrow of the British Empire. As for the British official in Palestine, his lot has often been an unenviable one. His daily round has compelled him to steer, as well as he is able, between two political maelstroms of thought, each revolving in opposite directions.

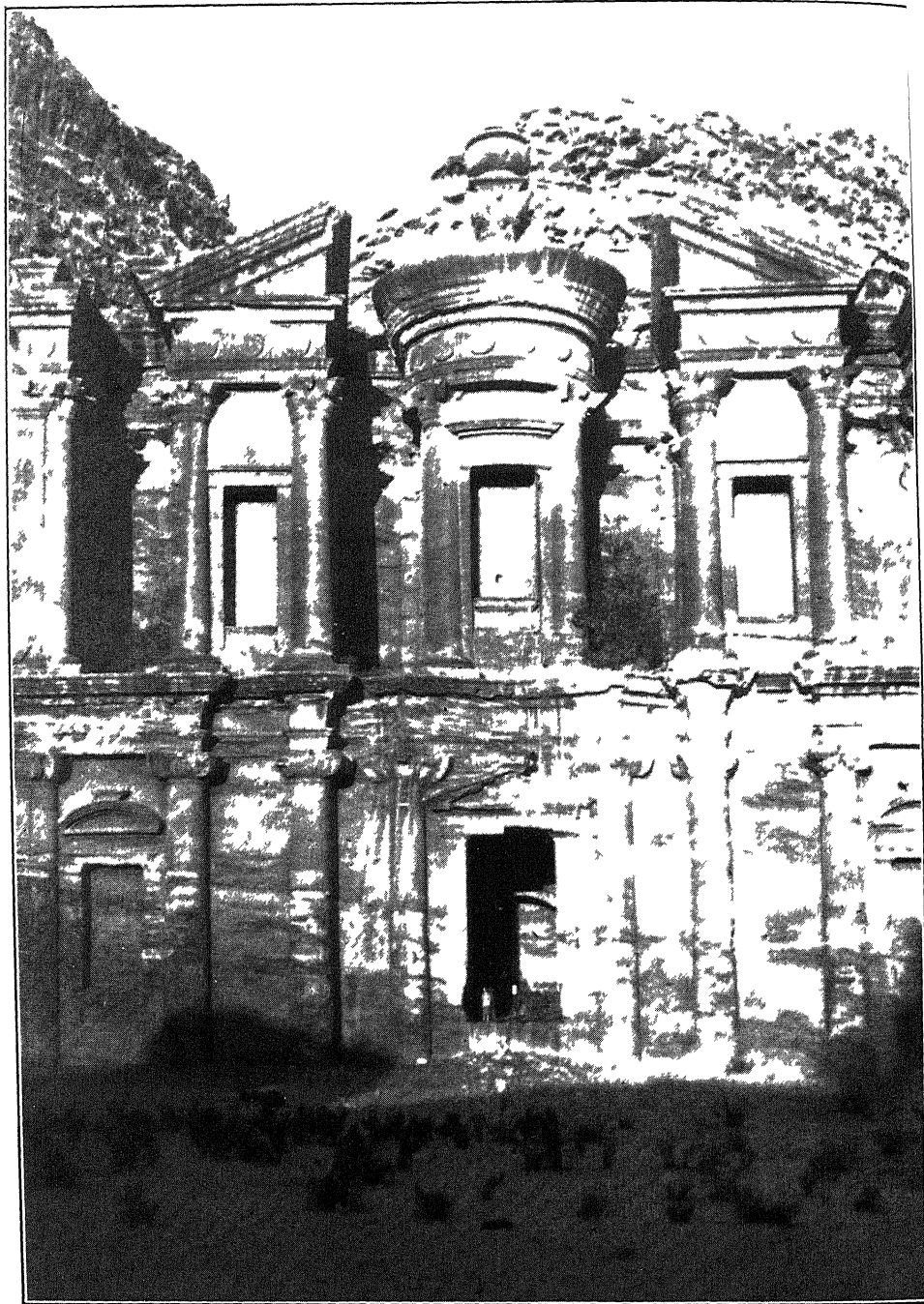
The first natural step in seeking to carry out the Mandate was to wed Jewish zeal and enthusiasm to British experience in colonisation. But here a third interloper, "Arabic Rights," suddenly appeared on the scene, forming a deadly triangle, and spoiling any chances of such a happy union. In the political tug-of-war which began to follow, between Arab and Jew, the British official seemed to turn away from the true perspective of a Jewish National Home. Leaving the dilemma to be settled by wiser brains in the homeland, he was apt to settle down, with characteristic aloofness from the two contending factions, to the ordinary routine of office. To regulate immigration, to avoid open clashes between the two peoples, to administer British justice impartially to all, and to show a good annual balance in his particular department, kept the average Britisher well enough occupied.

Many Britishers, especially those having no particular Jewish outlook, nor any acquaintance with the wonderful plan of Divine



THE HILL OF GOLGOTHA

NOTICE THE SKULL-LIKE APPEARANCE OF THE HILL FACE (Chap xix)



ROCK EXCAVATION KNOWN AS THE EL DEIR, PETRA

(Chap xxiii)



Photo C Raad Jerusalem

TEL AVIV

A STREET SCENE IN THIS MODERN CITY BUILT BY THE JEWS (Chap xxiv)



THE FIRST SHOT

AN ARAB CHILD INTERESTED IN A JEWISH SURVEYOR OF THE DEAD SEA POTASSIUM
COMPANY SURVEY (Chap III)

prophecy relating to the return of the Jews to Palestine, entertained secret or even open sympathy for the keenly-disappointed Arabic people, who once regarded Britain as their friend and their saviour from the Turks. On the other hand, the Jewish pioneer, willing to sacrifice everything, including life itself, for his enthusiastic ideal (which, to many, seemed nothing more than an empty fad); and spurred on by the vision of an Israel soon to be restored and glorified, held that nothing in the way of ordinary progress moved fast enough for his taste. Every increase in immigration or prosperity on the part of the Jews resulted in uneasiness in the Arabic majority and increased friction on both sides. Britain had, on the one hand, the peculiar task of protecting Moslem interests and, on the other hand, the fostering of Jewish interests in a land that was predominantly Moslem. To see the Arabic-speaking countries turning against Britain was just what they desired, and exactly suited their plans. Propaganda and money in abundance were secretly forthcoming to keep the fires of revolution steadily burning. The great Italian wireless station at Bari particularly distinguished itself for years in sending out, under the very eyes and ears of the long-suffering British, propaganda in the best Arabic, calculated to interest and, if possible, seduce the Arabic leaders and their followers both in towns and in the lonely desert. They even went so far as to present radio sets to many of the sheikhs and others.

Things seemed to be going very satisfactorily for the Axis Powers along these lines. When, however, war actually broke out on the Continent, and the Second World War was set in motion, something strange took place in the troubled land of Palestine. Jews and Arabs ceased to quarrel. A miracle seemed to have happened. The unknown human element had, at the last moment, cheated the Axis Powers of the fruits of years of intrigue. Faced with a common danger, all parties automatically agreed to bury the hatchet, at least for the time being; and the astonishing spectacle of Arabs and Jews drilling together in the same ranks against a common enemy could be seen throughout the country.

I V

A factor which gave distinct impetus to the return of the Jews to Palestine was the Hitler regime in Germany; and the systematic persecution meted out to this people brings very forcibly to mind the prophecy of Jeremiah 16. 16: "I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many

fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks."

If the Zionist organizations were fishing the Jews back to the land of their fathers, then Hitler was certainly hunting them back to Palestine; and, jostling together in the narrow streets of Jerusalem could be seen many of the fair-complexioned intelligentsia and elite of Germany who could never, under ordinary circumstances have been induced to leave their more rosy prospects in their native land.

v

The work done by the Jewish community in Palestine is truly wonderful. Capital has been poured into the country through the various organizations and by private individuals; numerous colonies have sprung up and prospered through scientific methods and irrigation; industries have been commenced, and the town of Tel Aviv has grown from a sand heap to a city of 170,000 people. The great plain of Sharon, bordering the Mediterranean, and many other places have begun to blossom as the rose. The orange plantations are amongst the best in the world, producing millions of cases per annum of the famous Jaffa oranges.

In the meantime, what has been happening to the Arab population? Has their position been bettered or made worse through Jewish immigration?

Though, deep in the heart of every Palestinian there is the lurking fear that, unless resisted, the Jew will one day be predominant, it cannot be denied that unprecedented prosperity has come to the land since Jewish immigration began. Profits, sometimes immense, have accrued through land sales to the Jews; taxes, raised largely from the richer Jewish community, have been spent mostly on the Palestinian natives. As a result of this, the country has better roads, better schools, new clinics, district nurses for the villages; and the price of produce, owing to the increased demand, is very much higher than ever it was under the old regime.

The increase in wages and the surplus of ready money has induced thousands of Arabs to flock across the border from surrounding territories, so that the increase in the Moslem population has well-nigh kept pace with Jewish immigration. Indeed, so prosperous was the financial position of the country prior to the Second World War, that thanks to the honesty of British administration,

coupled with the spirited enterprise of the Zionist Movement, there was actually a national surplus of several million pounds each year; so that the once poverty-stricken land of Palestine was in the unique position of being able to lend out money on interest. Reciprocal trade between Damascus, Beyrout, and Palestine was also brisk, and not merely one-sided as it had been in Turkish days. In fact, up till the time of the revolt, the sails for an unprecedented run of prosperity both for Jew and Arab could not have been more squarely trimmed. Not only in towns like Tel Aviv and Haifa, but in neighbouring Arabic towns like Jaffa, small merchants and traders found themselves becoming rich and prosperous. One Arabic friend in Haifa told me that for a corner section of land which his father had bought in Turkish times for £50, the Jews were now offering him hundreds of times its original value.

One of the chief complaints put forward by the Arab leaders was that in parting with his lands, the Arab would eventually bring himself to poverty. But much of the land bought by the Jews had been previously waste areas needing either draining or irrigation; and the money gained by the sale of this land could now be used by the Arabs to improve the land they still retained.

Also, the Arab is usually a shrewd man when it comes to the handling of money; many who had to eke out a bare existence under the old regime are now property-owners, drawing lucrative dividends from shops and houses for which the Jews and others pay stiff rents undreamed of in Turkish days.

VI

Of absorbing interest to many students in the world to-day is the Divine outlook, as presented in the Scriptures, concerning the international Jewish problem and the final return of the Jews to Palestine. It becomes obvious to the most casual reader of the Old Testament prophecies that God is steadily working out His sovereign will in a vast and comprehensive plan, having for its three main objectives, firstly, the completion and taking out of the world the one true Church of the redeemed for a heavenly people; secondly, the pardoning and receiving of the Jewish remnant back to the land of Palestine as the leading nation of His earthly kingdom; and, thirdly, the subjugation of all the Gentile nations to the benign and righteous rule of Him whose right it is to rule amongst men, both by virtue of His creatorial rights, and also by reason of His redemptive suffering for the sins of Adam's fallen race.

It was about 2000 years B.C. that Palestine first came into the world's limelight through being assigned to Abraham and his heirs by a Divine covenant remarkable for its unequivocal language and its binding character. "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12. 7). "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17. 8).

Time and time again this covenant was confirmed to the heirs of Abraham. Unlike most of the other Divine commitments, this covenant was unconditional, and the Deed of Gift to Abraham was in perpetuity. That meant that no moral lapse or disobedience on the part of the Twelve Tribes could ever annul the promise. Though, in the event of national disobedience or apostasy, the children of Israel might subsequently be scattered amongst the Gentile nations, as indeed they were, to be punished doubly in proportion to the Divine light and privileges which they had enjoyed; notwithstanding, the prophets are all unanimous in their declaration that Israel will one day return to Palestine, to take her place at the head of the Millennial Kingdom of Messiah.

"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice . . . Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord" (Hos. 3. 4, 5).

"And I will bring again the captivity of My people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them . . . and I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (Amos. 9. 14, 15).

"Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest" (Micah 3. 12).

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Micah 4. 1-2).

"For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken . . . Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives,

which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof" (Zech. 14. 2-4).

By these and many other references, the Bible makes it clear that at the end of the Gentile domination, which reaches its climax in the Anti-Christ, the Jews will be gathered back to the land of their fathers for the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom. But there is not the slightest suggestion that Palestine will ever be won back to the Jews by human effort in the way of conquest, the use of gold, or by intrigue. The Divine omnipotence which took away these rights from Israel will, when the right moment arrives, restore those rights. "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come unto thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought: and ye shall be redeemed without money" (Isaiah 52. 1-3).

The interesting statement of our Lord about the "fig tree," already alluded to, seems to shed some light on the present Jewish movement in Palestine. Before the coming of summer the fig tree begins to show signs of awakening from the dormant sleep of winter. It sends forth leaves, and these leaves presage the approach of the summer season and the bearing of precious fruit. But leaves are only an indication of what is soon to follow.

So, in these days when wars, earthquakes and distress of nations are the order of the day, the Jewish fig tree begins to awaken from its long winter, and leaves begin to appear. But how can the nation bear fruit while still it acknowledges no Messiah, and has neither a Temple nor a sacrifice? In vain did their national prophets warn them that their Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, and be called a Nazarene; that He would be "a man of sorrows," "pierced," "cut off" and "rejected"; yet, having made his soul "an offering for sin," He was to "see His seed" and the pleasure of the Lord was to "prosper in His hand." Despite these and scores of other prophecies being fulfilled before the very eyes of the Jews in the person of Christ, and despite the dynamic power of the Jewish Apostles and other Christians, who after Pentecost turned the world upside down by their preaching of the Gospel of Christ, the Jews as a nation remained obdurate. They had rejected their Messiah, the Son of God, and calamities came upon them. To-day, after nearly two thousand years, whether

in Palestine or out of Palestine, God's displeasure still rests upon the Jewish people. Persecuted and perplexed, they know not what awaits them on the morrow.

VII

But the severest trial both for the Jewish people and also for the Gentile nations lies still ahead. It is known in Scripture as the "Time of Jacob's Trouble." "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered . . ." (Dan. 12. 1). "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened . . . And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24. 21, 22, 30).

This will be when the flood tide of war, leading up to the great Armageddon, rolls across the Middle East; Antichrist having violated his covenant with the Jews "in the midst of the week" (Dan. 9. 27). In this bitterest hour of woe and judgment, the Lord will suddenly return to the Mount of Olives with power and great glory (Zech. 14. 4); the Jews will be brought face to face with the One Who was nailed to a Roman gibbet on Calvary.

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. 12. 10).

This mourning of the Jews will be followed by national repentance and forgiveness:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40. 1).

Thus shall sorrow be turned into joy. Jerusalem will be the world's political and spiritual centre of gravity. Vacillating democracies, and arrogant dictators will give place to Christ's

sovereign sway. The Church in Heaven, the Jew in the Holy Land, the Gentile nations around, all will be in complete loyalty and subjection to His will. The millennial reign will be ushered in; there will be peace, plenty, and longevity on the earth; the curse on creation will be removed, and the lion will lie down with the lamb. The Jewish problem will be solved for ever.

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you.

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein.

"No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35).

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